Cruz: PSS wants to bury sexual harassment problem. PAGE 2
Propst resolution supports EVS-TAP. PAGE 3

Hafa Adai!

# Saipan Tribune

$1

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KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

From left, Maj. Gen. Reginal G. A. Neal, deputy commanding general for the U.S Army Pacific; Rear Adm. Gregory Huffman, U.S Indo Pacific Command representative; Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, Maj. Gen. Mark Hashimoto, Mobilization Assistant to the Commander, U.S Indo-Pacific Command; and Brig. Gen. Christopher K. Faurot, commander, Guam Air National Guard.

## DOD, CNMI talk about military activities, impacts

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

The U.S. Department of Defense and the CNMI government held the first of a series of stakeholders' meetings this week to address some of the concerns of the CNMI community about military activities

*See DOD on Page 4*

# CHCC confirms 1st case of JN.1 COVID-19 variant

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. has confirmed one case of JN. 1 COVID-19 variant in the CNMI as of Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024. The specimen was collected and sent to Guam Public Health Laboratory for testing and confirmation.

JN.1 is a subvariant of Omicron that was first detected in late August 2023 by the World Health Organization. JN.1 cases have steadily increased but spiked on the U.S. mainland during the winter months

*See CHCC on Page 4*

## Driver's license validity amended for individuals pending CW-1 approvals

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

The Department of Public Safety has amended to just one year the validity of driver's licenses issued to foreign workers with pending CW-1 visa applications.

For as long as anyone can remember, DPS' Bureau of Motor Vehicles has allowed individuals with pending CW-1 approvals to renew or even acquire a new license by just showing a copy of a pending CW-1 receipt. These licenses held the same validity as regular licenses, which

*See LICENSE on Page 4*

## House OKs bill to designate casino license fee for retirees' 25% pension

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The House of Representatives unanimously passed yesterday a bill to designate the annual casino license fee to supplement the payment of the 25% of all government retirees' pensions.

Authored by Rep. Blas Jon-

*See HOUSE on Page 4*

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Rep. Blas Jonathan T. Attao (Ind-Saipan) discusses during a session yesterday his bill that seeks to designate the annual casino license fee to supplement the payment of the 25% of all the government retirees' pensions. The House of Representatives unanimously passed the legislation.

## INSIDE

**BUSINESS**
The Saipan Chamber of Commerce installed its new board of directors and board officers during the Chamber's Annual Business Person of the Year Gala last Saturday night.
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**WORLD**
The prospect of a full-scale war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia terrifies people on both sides of the border.
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**OFFBEAT**
First there were cafés that allowed pets. Then came cat cafés, where lattes took second place to feline interaction. The latest craze in Japan: The pig café.
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# Local

## Cruz accuses PSS of wanting to bury sex harassment problem

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Dr. Bobby Cruz, director of Instructional Technology & Distance Learning at the Public School System, accuses PSS of trying to cover up the ongoing sexual harassment problem within the system, citing communications between the Board of Education and administrative hearing officer Catherine J. Cachero in his ongoing sexual harassment complaint against former Education commissioner Dr. Afred B. Ada.

Cruz

Cruz, through his lawyers, Robert Torres and Charity Hodson, sent a written motion yesterday to Cachero and BOE members, demanding her disqualification and for the BOE to issue a finding that he has exhausted all administrative relief. That would essentially allow Cruz to bring his complaint to court.

Cruz said his request is warranted as his grievance is not going through a "fair and impartial" process. He alleges that his team was able to acquire evidence of impermissible, improper ex parte communication between Cachero and members of the BOE, where the board allegedly directed Cachero to limit what matters to be heard during Cruz's administrative hearing and to essentially ignore his sexual harassment allegations.

Cruz's lawyers argue this is in violation of his constitutional right to due process, and in violation of the ethical duties of a hearing officer to preside over administrative hearings with impartiality and to abstain from ex parte communications.

"This is not a fair or impartial process and Dr. Cruz has exhausted every opportunity to try to present his case. PSS and the board have demonstrated that it is unable to provide that forum," states the motion.

"Despite PSS' repeated anthems of transparency and integrity, the only transparent takeaway here is that PSS is determined to bury what is obviously a continuing sexual harassment problem at PSS. And who would expect any different? If PSS allows sexual harassment to occur to multiple employees by the head of the institution, the commissioner of Education, how would anyone expect that sexual harassment would not multiply and flourish for the last decade, now apparently to the detriment of underage students? There is no transparency where the board engages in secret communications and directives to the hearing officer. There is no integrity when the board dictates what issues can be heard by controlling the hearing officer. The AHO must be disqualified, and the board must issue a decision that administrative remedies have been exhausted," the motion added.

Based on documents reportedly acquired by Cruz's team, BOE's legal counsel had allegedly emailed Cachero that, because Ada had already resigned, he believes the harassment portion of the grievance

*See CRUZ on Page 4*

# Propst resolution supports EVS-TAP

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

Rep. Edwin K. Propst (D-Saipan) introduced yesterday a resolution to express support for the CNMI Economic Vitality & Security Travel Authorization Program, or EVS-TAP, and encourage the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to work with the CNMI government and its leaders to facilitate the responsible promotion of the Chinese tourism market.

EVS-TAP will allow prescreened national of the People's Republic of China to travel to the CNMI without a visa under specific conditions and stay for up to 14 days.

Propst's House Resolution 23-19 received strong support from the Saipan Chamber of Commerce, Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Marianas Visitors Authority.

Propst

Propst, who is the House floor leader, said in an interview after the session that he is grateful to House Speaker Edmund S. Villagomez (Ind-Saipan) and colleagues for agreeing to this resolution.

"We see the strong support from basically all leaders and including our Delegate, Congressman [Gregorio] Kilili Sablan," he said.

Propst said Chamber president Joe Guerrero, HANMI chair Dennis Seo, and MVA board chair Gloria Cavanagh spoke during the session's public comments portion to support this resolution.

"So we hope that that the EVS-TAP gets implemented very soon and we move quickly on it because, as we heard earlier, our hotels are suffering," Propst said. He quoted Seo as saying that, even the Pacific Islands Club Saipan, which is comparatively doing well, has an average hotel occupancy of only about 40%, which is still very low. He said Seo also mentioned that some hotels are operating at 10% occupancy.

"So it's deeply concerning. The hotels cannot continue to operate like this," said Propst, adding that their biggest worry is the repercussions on an already hurting economy if these hotels close down.

"We are hoping to have everybody on board, move quickly on this, embrace diversity in the CNMI's tourism, and do the best we can," he added.

He underscored the need for hotel rooms to be occupied in order to generate revenues for the CNMI government, like the hotel occupancy tax, among others.

Last Jan. 18, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued an interim final ruling that established the EVS-TAP, with an effective date of September 2024.

Propst stated in the reso-

See PROPST on Page 4

# Bill to authorize CHCC charitable foundation gets unanimous House support

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The House of Representatives unanimously passed yesterday a bill that would authorize the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. to organize and assist in establishing a charitable foundation.

With all 19 House members present voting "yes," House Bill 23-87, House Substitute 1, now goes to the Senate for action. Rep. Vicente Camacho (D-Saipan) was absent, but excused from the session.

Several spoke in the public comments portion of the session to support the bill, including CHCC chief strategy officer Eleonor Cabrera, Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Joe Guerrero, Chamber spokesperson Alex Sablan, CHCC deputy chief medical officer Dr. Martin Rohringer, and CHCC chief operations officer for business and quality assurance.

Before the voting, Rep. Malcolm J. Omar (Ind-Saipan), who is the author of the bill, thanked Cabrera, the CHCC management, and the House legal counsel for their review, recommendations, and revisions.

Omar

The bill states that establishing an affiliated foundation will allow CHCC to increase access to capital for investment in local health care capacity. Omar said the bill restores the authority of CHCC to participate in the creation of an independent, affiliated charitable foundation that may benefit health care.

He describes the foundation as a powerful vehicle for channeling investment into pivotal areas such as new program development, technological upgrades, facility improvements, and the expansion of essential services.

The House adopted the House Ways and Means Committee report that recommends the passage of the legislation.

Rep. Ralph N. Yumul (Ind-Saipan), who chairs the Ways and Means Committee, said the amendments the committee did on the bill include an additional corporate power that will authorize CHCC to participate and assist in the creation of an independent charitable foundation that operates for the primary benefit of improving healthcare within CHCC.

He said the charitable foundation shall be governed separately from CHCC.

Except for one CHCC trustee, the board of directors for the foundation shall not include any active employees or trustees of CHCC.

Yumul said the CHCC chief executive officer or a designee may serve as a nonvoting member of the foundation's board.

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## CHCC

*From page 1*

and now makes up approximately 86% of the current circulating strains.

"We expect the numbers to increase in the CNMI as more people continue to travel throughout the region," said CHCC in a news release yesterday.

The symptoms of JN.1 are sore throat, congestion, dry cough, runny nose, headache, fatigue, muscle aches, diarrhea, and changes in taste or smell. These symptoms are said to be similar and no more severe than the other strains.

Although the most recent COVID-19 vaccines were developed against another Omicron strain, studies have shown that the vaccines are expected to lower chances of serious illness or hospitalization from the variants that are currently circulating. The most updated COVID-19 vaccines were released late September to early October 2023.

"If you received a COVID-19 vaccine before October 2023, you might need a vaccine update. These vaccines are available for people ages 6 months and older," said CHCC.

If you think you've been exposed to COVID-19 or feeling symptoms, get tested, stay home and do not attend gatherings until you know your results. People who test positive should stay home, even if they do not have symptoms. Always look for emergency warning signs, such as trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or bluish lips or face. Please call your healthcare provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you. Call 911 if an emergency is occurring and notify the operator that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.

If you are not experiencing symptoms and have not tested positive, consider getting vaccinated with the most updated COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination is especially important for people living with chronic conditions, pregnant mothers, young children, and *man'amko.*

**Community based testing and travel testing**

COVID-19 testing is available Monday to Friday, 8am-11am and 12:30pm-3:30pm. Saturday hours are 8:30am-11am. Register at https://covidtesting.chcc.health/ online and bring a valid ID. Check-in area is at the CHC ER registration window. Initial testing is still free, any additional testing fees may be covered by insurance. Self-testing kits are also available for purchase at most pharmacies.

Additionally, consider self-testing at home using rapid tests available for purchase in nearby pharmacies.

**A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com**

## DOD

*From page 1*

affecting the region.

Representing the DOD during the two-day conference are Brig. Gen. Christopher K. Faurot, commander of the Guam Air National Guard; Rear Adm. Gregory Huffman, U.S Indo-Pacific Command representative; Maj. Gen. Mark Hashimoto, Mobilization Assistant to the Commander, U.S Indo-Pacific Command; and Maj. Gen. Reginal G. A. Neal, deputy commanding general for the U.S. Army Pacific.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin joined the meeting virtually, along with military partners from the rest of the Pacific.

Hashimoto said in an interview during a break that the stakeholders' meetings aim make sure that the Department of Defense and its CNMI partners understand what the department is doing in the Marianas across a wide variety of functional areas.

"This is the latest in a series of quarterly stakeholders' meetings that we've been having in several years. To me, what this represents is mutual respect where we meet as equal partners, making sure we are aligned as to details about activities that are coming up—some short term, some in the medium term, and some are in the long term. The last and most important thing is making sure that we continue the momentum for all of these projects," he said.

For Hashimoto, the highlight of the meeting was getting CNMI stakeholders to open up about some of their concerns.

"The highlight was how we opened up and how most of the time was spent on concerns of the CNMI. How the people of the CNMI, the businesses here, can find ways into some of the advantages that come with large military projects so that could be through the Federal Acquisition process, or it could be jobs that are coming up as a result of our activities," he said.

Other things discussed, Hashimoto said, was the rehabilitation of the World War II-era North Field on Tinian, the environmental impact of the Divert Airfield project, upcoming trainings, and the area development plan for the Tinian Port.

"Construction continues, equipment has been delivered to North Field. The progress continues and we are moving into the execution phase," he said.

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios said these kinds of meetings ensure that CNMI stakeholders can take advantage of the benefits that come with the DOD partnering with the CNMI, and for them to be aware of community activities the DOD may have in the future.

"This is the second of a series of stakeholders' meetings and executive briefing meetings that I have attended and, in our meetings, the mayors of the three municipalities [and] members of the Legislature were involved. Now we are trying our best to get everybody involved in the discussions so that we can maximize benefits the Commonwealth can have and maximize the awareness we have as a community on the activities of the DOD in our communities," he said.

## HOUSE

*From page 1*

athan T. Attao (Ind-Saipan), House Bill 23-96 also seeks to identify recipients of the funds generated from the casino gross revenue tax.

All 19 House members present at the session voted "yes" for the passage of the legislation. Rep. Vicente Camacho (D-Saipan) was absent, but excused from the session. The bill now goes to the Senate for action.

Before the voting, Attao thanked House members for signing off on the bill to revert the casino license fee monies directly to the retirees' 25% pension.

"This is not a new bill," said Attao. Similar legislations have been introduced since the 19th Legislature; this is now the 23rd Legislature.

A similar bill made it to the Senate during the 21st Legislature, but it was never passed, Attao said.

He pointed out that the casino industry was introduced into the CNMI in the first place to take care of retirees and their pensions.

"That was the goal. … That's why the retirees supported the casino industry to be legalized in the CNMI," the lawmaker said.

Unfortunately, he said, under Public Law 20-10, the provision to use the license fee to pay for the retirees 25% was removed.

What Attao's bill does is revert the monies back into a special account to address the 25% of the retirees' pension.

When they first started the casino industry, Attao said, it obligated about $70.8 million to the retirees' pension.

He said he believes the attorney general, along with the Department of Finance, is working with the casino industry right now to make it pay at least $25 million up front.

"We can get those monies reserved for the retirees and… we can utilize some of those funds to provide the retirees possible bonuses," Attao said.

He said this legislation will allow some flexibility to use those funds to give them some sort of a bonus within the calendar year so retirees can have a subsistence allowance to use for themselves and their dependents.

Attao said the CNMI government's only obligation to the Settlement Fund is 75% of retirees' pensions. This refers to a lawsuit filed by a retiree, which eventually ended in a settlement where the CNMI government is obliged to pay 75% of retirees' pension. The CNMI government has then been dipping into its coffers to pay out the remaining 25% of pensions—although it is not obliged to do so.

"We owe the retirees 25%. They're protected by the Constitution. We still have to pay them whether it's delayed or not. We still have to pay that 25%," Attao said.

He said this bill will make sure the money is secured for at least the next six to seven years, depending on mortality rates of the retirees and their dependents.

Attao is hoping that this legislation will finally make it out of the Legislature so it can get to the governor's desk for signature or at least for consideration by the administration.

"It's very important that we secure the funds for the retirees because we know that they're one of the biggest challenges in our general appropriations," he said.

## LICENSE

*From page 1*

is about three years.

However, following the recent discovery that the former BMV administration helped carry out license fraud schemes, DPS decided to make a few changes, including the revision of the validity of licenses issued to individuals with pending CNMI-Only transitional worker visa applications.

According to a public notice from DPS dated Jan. 31, 2024, BMV is now issuing temporary CNMI-only driver's licenses to individuals whose CW-1 status is pending processing by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The temporary driver's license, DPS said, is only valid for one year so DPS can ensure that driver's licenses are only issued to individuals legally allowed to be in the CNMI.

"BMV shall issue a driver's license, temporary driver's license, identification card, or temporary identification card to a qualified applicant who has submitted all required documents and has complied with all applicable laws and regulations.

To acquire a temporary license, an individual must have either an unexpired non-immigrant visa or non-immigrant visa status for entry into the United States; a pending application for asylum in the United States; a pending or approved application for temporary protected status in the United States; an approved deferred action status or a pending application for adjustment of status to that of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States, or conditional permanent resident status in the United States.

DPS said a person must show documentation that they fit within one of these categories to qualify for a temporary CNMI driver's license.

"Therefore, the department must receive and verify documentation establishing that the individual seeking a driver's license qualifies under these categories in order to be issued a temporary driver's license," said DPS' notice.

## PROPST

*From page 3*

lution that the EVS-TAP will require persons intending to travel from China to the CNMI under the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program to submit Form I-736 electronically and in advance of travel. These visitors will then receive an electronic travel authorization prior to boarding—as opposed to presenting the form upon arrival, thereby providing both the visitor and DHS adequate notice and time to resolve any security issues before embarkation and departure.

Propst said the EVS-TAP will establish an automated process that will increase national security and shorten wait times for travelers, which could lead to overall traveler satisfaction.

In addition, he said "the change would also save U.S. Customs and Border Protection time and money and allow CBP officers to spend more time focusing on a traveler's purpose for visiting the territories rather than on processing forms, data entry, and hard copy storage."

Propst said the interim final ruling expressly provides that the current parole policy for PRC nationals seeking to enter the CNMI will be discontinued after the EVS-TAP is fully implemented and announced in the Federal Register.

He said the EVS-TAP is supported by Sablan, the Chamber, HANMI, MVA, and other CNMI lawmakers because it addresses the national concerns raised by members of the U.S. Congress that called for the abolition of the discretionary parole program while also providing a viable and reasonable way for properly vetted individuals from China to visit the Commonwealth where they provide a significant economic benefit to the economy.

## CRUZ

*From page 2*

has become moot.

Cachero, in her response, disagreed with the BOE legal counsel's assessment that Ada's resignation limits Cruz's grievance.

"However…the AHO affirmed that despite her reservations, she would follow the instructions of the board and skip an investigation, only hear the salary claim, and would not hear the allegations of discrimination based on sexual harassment and a hostile work environment," said the motion.

Cruz alleges that this is the third time he and his team have called for an issuance of an order finding he has exhausted all administrative remedies.

"This matter has now been pending for 14 months. Members of the board making decisions on this issue include a board member who is related to Dr. Ada and impermissibly participated in the decision to direct the AHO not to decide the issue of whether her brother-in-law, Dr. Ada, sexually harassed Dr. Cruz and other PSS employees for the last decade. The board initiated and engaged in ex parte communications with the AHO they had appointed supposedly to be fair and neutral, which misconduct now requires her disqualification," said the motion.

Cruz filed his grievance against the commissioner back in November 2022 alleging the commissioner of sexual harassment and other unprofessional conduct including a reduction in salary.

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# MVA holds 2023 New Year Seminar in Korea

With high hopes for the continued gradual growth of arrivals from the Marianas' top market of Korea, the Marianas Visitors Authority held its 2024 New Year Seminar in Seoul recently to begin collaboration with travel partners for 2024.

Over 70 representatives of travel agencies, airlines, travel trade media, hotels and resorts, and other travel partners joined the event, held on Jan. 18 at JW Marriott Dongdaemun. The event was also attended by officials of the U.S. Embassy in Korea—commercial officer Michael Kim and senior commercial specialist Jessica Son.

"In 2023, we achieved a 73% recovery of Korean visitors to the Marianas compared to 2019, the year before the pandemic," MVA board chair Gloria Cavanagh reported to attendees in her welcoming remarks. "We are especially grateful to our airline partners for their continued confidence in our scheduled and charter flights."

The Marianas has direct flights from Seoul to Saipan by Jeju Air, T'way, and Asiana Airlines. According to the MVA, the supply of air seats from Incheon to Saipan totaled 233,316, achieving a recovery rate of 70% compared to the 2019 figure of 335,387 seats. The number of Korean visitors to the Marianas reached 177,476 in Calendar Year 2023, showing a recovery rate of 73% compared to the 2019 figure of 241,776.

"The recovery rate of visitor numbers surpassing the recovery rate of airline seats is particularly encouraging," said Kim Se-jin, in-country manager of the MVA Korea office, adding that the outlook for the travel market in the Marianas this year is very optimistic.

The seminar included an update on new developments related to travel in the Marianas and—in the spirit of the new year holiday—games and giveaways, which were warmly received by participants in the sub-freezing temperatures of Seoul. ***(MVA)***

MVA

Marianas Visitors Authority board chair Gloria Cavanagh (back row, second right), MVA board member Jamika Taijeron (back row, second left), MVA deputy managing director Judy Torres (back, left) and management and staff at the MVA New Year Seminar on Jan. 18, 2024, in Seoul, Korea. Over 70 representatives of travel agencies, airlines, media, and other travel trade partners attended the event.

MVA

Over 70 travel trade partners attend the Marianas Visitors Authority's New Year Seminar on Jan. 18, 2024, in Seoul, Korea, to review the successes of 2023 and begin collaboration on further partnership in 2024. Korea is the top source market of the Marianas.

**NORTHERN MARIANAS COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE**
**P.O. BOX 506689, SAIPAN, MP 96950**
**PHONE: 670.234.3878**

The Northern Marianas Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence's mission is to promote, nourish, and sustain a collective movement against violence. All applicants must be familiar with and agree with NMCADSV's mission to eliminate domestic and sexual violence.

## POSITION DESCRIPTION

**Position Title:** Program Assistant
**Salary Range:** $10.00/hr to $14.00/hr

Job Summary
The Program Assistant will work with the Executive Director of NMCADSV and its Board to achieve its mission, goals, and objectives. The Program Assistant will support the daily operations of NMCADSV, including support for NMCADSV staff, the Executive Director and/or NMCADSV Board/Members, as assigned.

Duties
- Confers with and reports to the Executive Director
- Assists with the coordination of all NMCADSV activities; including event planning, logistics for NMCADSV and Board meetings, prepartion of materials, and travel logistics
- Provides administrative and clerical support to the Executive Director and the NMCADSV Board of Directors and Members; including receiving calls, receiving and logging mail, and maintaining records, as assigned
- Maintains and manages the NMCADSV membership database
- Assists with finance and operations of the NMCADSV; including daily bookkeeping, vendor relations and record keeping
- Attends all meetings and conference calls, as requested
- Travels to national and inter-island meetings and conferences, as required by the Executive Director
- Oversees the maintenance of office equipment and manages office inventory
- Assists the Executive Director in grants management, including the preparation of application packets and gathering data for reports
- Performs other duties, as assigned

Minimum Qualifications
- High School Diploma, or equivalent
- An agreement with NMCADSV's mission statement and philosophy regarding the elimination of domestic and sexual violence
- Experience in providing clerical and administrative support, including record keeping
- Demonstrated abilities in verbal and written communication
- Proficiency in MS Word and Excel
- Willingness to learn in all areas of NMCADSV operations
- Flexible Schedule
- Must be able to travel

Highly Desired Qualifications
- 1 year of documented experience/work with non-profit organizations or volunteerism
- Own transportation, with documented insurance, registration, and a valid driver's license

**To Apply:**
A **Resume and Cover Letter** should be submitted on or before 5:00 p.m. on **Friday, February 9, 2024**. Provide a list (not copies) of any certifications and/or awards. Late and incomplete submissions will not be considered.

Submit **resume and cover letter** to alleny@endviolencenmi.org, deliver to NMCADSV's office **(between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.)** at the Marina Heights I Building (2nd Floor, Suite 206) or mail to NMCADSV, P.O. Box 506689, Saipan, MP 96950. (Mailed applications must be postmarked on or before the deadline.) Applicants who are invited for an interview will be asked to bring a copy of their Diploma or equivalent, Police Clearance (within the last 30 days), valid Passport, and a list of references. NMCADSV is an equal opportunity employer. Individuals from under-served communities are encouraged to apply.

This project is 100% supported by federal grants, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice and Grant # G-2301MPSD-VC awarded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this release are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

# 25th Annual Taste of the Marianas Int'l Food Festival in May 2024

The 25th Annual Taste of the Marianas International Food Festival will be held every Saturday in May 2024 at American Memorial Park on Saipan, featuring some of the destination's best cuisine and entertainment.

The Taste of the Marianas is organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority and is a highlight of May Tourism Month. This year's festival will be held on the evening of May 4, 11, 18, and 25, 2024.

"A quarter century ago, the MVA leadership at the time began a series of annual signature events to attract visitors and media attention to The Marianas…Taste of the Marianas was one of those first signature events and it has since grown to become the most attended annual event in Saipan. We're aiming to make this year's 25th festival the best!" said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "In cooperation with beautiful American Memorial Park, we're excited to bring the festival back to the park this year, and we have more exciting developments we will be announcing in the coming weeks. Mark your calendars and make your travel plans for "Taste" every Saturday in May!"

Taste of the Marianas features affordable dishes from local hotels and restaurants, live entertainment, food eating competitions, cooking contests, arts and crafts sales, and more.

For more information or for vendor inquires, contact MVA Community Projects specialist Ray Villagomez at rvillagomez@mymarians.com or (670) 664-3200. ***(MVA)***

MVA

Michael Do, right, and Madge Gai chew their way to 1st place and 3rd place, respectively, in the Inas' Fried Chicken Wing Eating Contest at the Taste of The Marianas International Food Festival in June 2023 in Saipan. The 25th Annual Taste of The Marianas will be held by the Marianas Visitors Authority on May 4, 11, 18, and 25, 2024.

# Scheduled power service interruptions on Feb. 3, 6, 7,10

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the general public that there will be scheduled power service interruptions on Feb. 3, 6, 7, and 10, 2024, as CUC continues its ongoing system maintenance. See additional information below:

**Saturday, Feb. 3, 2024**
Power Service Interruption Time: 6am-2pm

- Area(s) Affected: Garapan
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None

Momentary Power Service Interruption Time(s): 6am-6:30am and 1:30pm-2pm

- Area(s) Affected: Garapan
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: S-5
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None

Purpose: To allow CUC linemen to relocate and replace a 45-foot wooden power pole with a 45-foot concrete pole, along with a three-phase primary overhead line. Additionally, to relocate underground high-voltage cables.

CUC

Map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s scheduled power service interruption on Feb. 10, 2024.

**Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024**

- Power Service Interruption Time: 9am-1pm
- Area(s) Affected: San Antonio (Guili St., partials of Kacho Ave., Gatdas Ave., and Laiguan Ave.)
- Water Well(s) Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow CUC linemen to replace a 45-foot concrete pole with a 40-foot concrete pole.

**Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024**

- Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: San Antonio (Gatdas Ave., Hiyok St., and Hakmang Ave.)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow CUC linemen to replace three 45-foot concrete poles with 40-foot concrete poles and replace two 45-foot wooden power poles with 40-foot concrete poles.

**Saturday, Feb. 10, 2024**

- Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-2:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Susupe (Marianas High School)
- Water Wells Affected: None
- Wastewater Facilities Affected: None
- Traffic Light(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow CUC linemen to replace a 45-foot wooden power pole with a 40-foot concrete pole and replace a leaking transformer.

For more information, contact its hotline at (670) 236-4333, visit its website, and monitor its Facebook page for the latest updates. In case of emergencies, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(CUC)***

# *FAC remains the same for February 2024*

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. announced that the Fuel Adjustment Charge remains the same at $0.24894 per kWh for the month of February 2024. Although there has been a slight increase in the average fuel oil prices, the increase did not equal or exceed a 4.5% differential of the average per gallon cost of fuel.

The FAC is one of two components that make up the CUC electric rate, which is strictly for fuel and fuel-related purchases. The second component is the CUC base rate, which has not increased since April 2014 and is used to fund operations, projects, debt services, or any nonfuel-related expenses. ***(CUC)***

# Nominations open for 2024 Champions of Equal Opportunity Awards Ceremony

The CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities and the CNMI-University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at Northern Marianas College, in collaboration with the CNMI Disability Network Partners, proudly announce the commencement of nominations for the 2024 Champions of Equal Opportunity Awards Ceremony.

The esteemed Champions of Equal Opportunity awards, an annual recognition event, honor exceptional leaders who champion the cause of equal opportunity for individuals with developmental disabilities in the CNMI. Sponsored by the CNMI DD Council and its disability network partners, these awards celebrate individuals whose tireless efforts align with the values

of self-determination, independence, productivity, inclusion, and integration within the CNMI community.

The nomination process encourages community members from Saipan, Tinian, and Rota to nominate outstanding individuals who have demonstrated remarkable dedication towards advancing the quality of life for those with developmental disabilities. Nominations are sought in various categories such as:

- Educator Advocate of the Year
- Employer Advocate of the Year
- Family Advocate of the Year
- Self-Advocate of the Year
- Public/Private Entity Advocate of the
- Year
- Legislative Advocate of the Year
- Advocate of the Year

The awards ceremony is scheduled for March 4, 2024, following the proclamation ceremony.

While organizers hope for the participation of awardees in person, a virtual option will also be available. The precise timing of the event will be confirmed closer to the date. Nominees are requested to ensure their availability for participation, either in person or virtually, to ensure their recognition during the ceremony.

Community members are encouraged to nominate deserving individuals by utilizing the provided QR codes specific to their respective islands. However, a printable submission form is also attached should you prefer to submit nominations physically.

Google nomination forms must be completed by Feb. 16, 2024. If you have any questions, email the council at info@cnmicdd.gov.mp or call (670) 664-7000/3/5. ***(PR)***

ANTONIO SAL BORJA, Chairman · JAMES M. MENDIOLA, Vice Chairman · HENRY H. SAN NICOLAS, Member · DONALD M. HOFSCHNEIDER, Member · CHARLENE M. LIZAMA, Executive Director

## TINIAN CASINO GAMING CONTROL COMMISSION

Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

## PUBLIC NOTICE

Pursuant to 1 CMC § 9910(a), the Tinian Casino Gaming Control Commission (TCGCC) hereby gives notice that it will hold its Regular Meeting, on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at the TCGCC Conference Room.

**AGENDA**

I. **PRELIMINARY**
   a. Call to Order
   b. Roll Call
   c. Adoption of Agenda
   d. Adoption of Minutes
      1. January 17, 2024 – Regular Meeting

II. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**[1]

III. **REPORTS**
   a. Chair's Report
   b. Executive Director's Report

IV. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**
   a. Status Update of Bridge Investment Group/Tinian Diamond Casino

V. **NEW BUSINESS**
   a. ED Recommendation No. 2024-02
   b. ED Recommendation No. 2024-02.CSI. CSI(e).Enterprise Registration

VI. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**[2]

VII. **OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS**
   a. Bridge Investment Group's Letter of January 29, 2024

VIII. **MISCELLANEOUS AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

IX. **ADJOURNMENT**

[1]Public comments are limited to 30 minutes and each remark is limited to 3 minutes. Everyone is welcome to submit written comments.
[2]Pursuant to 1 CMC § 9912, the Commission may vote to meet in executive session at any time.

## DIVISION OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES
## CNMI GOVERNMENT

**INVITATION TO BID**
**ITB NO.: ITB24-ZB-42400037**

**SUBMISSION DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 2024 TIME: 09:00 A.M.**

**"OFFICE SPACE LEASE FOR ZONING BOARD"**

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED ON THE MUNIS VENDOR SELF SERVICE PORTAL (https://selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/) OR AT THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT SERVICES, LOCATED AT BLDG NO. 12552, ANATAHAN DRIVE, CAPTIOL HILL, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

**QUESTIONS** REGARDING THIS ITB CAN BE MADE TO THE ZONING BOARD BY FEBRUARY 9TH, 2024, TO MRS. THERESE OGUMORO VIA EMAIL AT zoningboard@cnmizoning.com

**THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.**

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ THERESE OGUMORO
ADMINISTRATOR, ZONING

/S/ BRIEN SERS NICHOLAS JR.
ACTING DIRECTOR, PS

## COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY

MAIN OFFICE: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2ND FLOOR ARRIVAL BLDG.
PO BOX 501055•SAIPAN•MP•96950
PHONE: (1-670) 237-6500/1 • FAX: (1-670) 234-5962
WEBSITE: WWW.CNMIPORTS.COM

**REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING DESIGN AND PLANNING SERVICES**

**SAIPAN HARBOR DREDGING PROJECT**
**PORT OF SAIPAN**
**PROJECT NO. CPA-SS-002-24**

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is soliciting statements of professional qualifications from interested Consultants for Architectural and Engineering (A/E) Design and Planning Services for the Saipan Harbor Dredging Project at the Port of Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Project No. CPA-SS-002-24.

The project is being funded by the U.S. Maritime Administration and is in accordance and compliance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the RFQ package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater at wprater@cnmiports.com or Ms. Sheri LIagas at receptionist@cnmiports.com.

Questions regarding this request for qualification statements must be submitted to Ms. Prater, CPA's Executive Assistant/Project Manager, via email to wprater@cnmiports.com or hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office, by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, February 2, 2024.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested Consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their professional qualification statements, no later than **5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024.** Statements of qualification must be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

Date: January 9, 2024

## COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY

MAIN OFFICE: SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 2ND FLOOR ARRIVAL BLDG.
PO BOX 501055•SAIPAN•MP•96950
PHONE: (1-670) 237-6500/1 • FAX: (1-670) 234-5962
WEBSITE: WWW.CNMIPORTS.COM

**AMENDED REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION STATEMENTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL/ENGINEERING DESIGN AND PLANNING SERVICES**

**CHARLIE DOCK EXTENSION PROJECT**
**PORT OF SAIPAN**
**PROJECT NO. CPA-SS-001-24**

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, CPA is soliciting statements of professional qualifications from interested Consultants for Architectural and Engineering (A/E) Design and Planning Services for the Charlie Dock Extension Project at the Port of Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Project No. CPA-SS-001-24.

The project is being funded by the U.S. Maritime Administration and is in accordance and compliance with CPA's Procurement Rules and Regulations, Section 40-50-202, Architect-Engineer Design and Construction Management Services.

The Request for Qualification (RFQ) Package is available at CPA's Administration Office, 2nd floor of the arrival terminal at the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport. No fee is required for obtaining the RFQ package. Electronic copies may be made available upon written request to Ms. Wendi Prater at wprater@cnmiports.com or Ms. Sheri LIagas at receptionist@cnmiports.com.

Questions regarding this request for qualification statements must be submitted to Ms. Prater, CPA's Executive Assistant/Project Manager, via email to wprater@cnmiports.com or hand delivered to the CPA Administration Office by no later than 5:00 p.m. CHST, Friday, January 26, 2024.

The statements of professional qualification will be evaluated based on the criteria available in the RFQ package.

Interested Consultants are requested to submit one (1) original, four (4) copies and one (1) electronic version in .pdf of their statements of professional qualifications no later than **5:00 p.m. CHST, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2024.** Statements of qualification must be presented by a combination of both brochures and the use of current U.S. Government Standard Form 330.

The CPA reserves the right to reject any or all statements of professional qualification for any reason, if in its sole opinion to do so would be in its best interest.

/s/ LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

Date: January 18, 2024

# Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 24

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**Mark Rabago** EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

## EDITORIAL

# Do Republicans want to secure the border—or help Trump's presidential campaign?

For months, with the encouragement of the Biden administration, a bipartisan group of senators has been hammering out a compromise on new border security measures as part of a $110 billion supplemental spending bill that would also include aid for Ukraine in its defense against Russian aggression.

Yet even before the agreement is unveiled, that great disrupter Donald Trump has denounced it. Speaker Mike Johnson, whose Republican House majority functions as an adjunct of Trump's presidential campaign, has suggested that if rumors about the measure are true, it is "dead on arrival" in that chamber.

Trump's attempt to sabotage the agreement even as it is still being negotiated suggests that he cares less about border security—a cause he has trumpeted in often ugly terms—than about being able to hammer President Biden on the issue on the campaign trail—if, as seems sadly likely, Trump wins the Republican presidential nomination.

To their credit, senators involved in the negotiation are persevering in spite of Trump's meddling, and an agreement appears imminent. On Sunday, Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, the lead Republican negotiator, defended the legislation, suggesting that some of his Republican colleagues misunderstand what it would do. For his part, Biden has said the bill under discussion would be "the toughest and fairest set of reforms to secure the border we've ever had in our country."

Until the compromise is finalized and made public, it's difficult to evaluate whether it would go too far in restricting immigration—as a bill passed last year by the Republican-controlled House would. Reportedly, senators have been discussing tightening the standards for the "credible fear" of persecution or torture used in initial interviews with migrants requesting asylum.

Apparently, the bill as it has evolved would not include drastic restrictions on the president's ability to admit migrants under his humanitarian parole authority.

Biden also said that the emerging legislation would give him "new emergency authority to shut down the border when it becomes overwhelmed." (Johnson countered that Biden could shut down the border without legislation.) And the president reiterated his request for Congress to fund additional border patrol agents, immigration judges and asylum officers.

Important as securing the border might be, it shouldn't be a prerequisite for an urgent infusion of military aid for Ukraine. Although attention to Ukraine's fight to defend itself has waned in recent months, ongoing U.S. support sends the important message that Russian aggression elsewhere will not be tolerated.

For now, at least, assistance for Ukraine depends on progress on border security. Senators who are pursuing a reasonable compromise on that issue are right to stand strong, despite resistance by Trump and his enablers in the House.

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Oh,no... We aren't going to solve this border crisis until after the November elections!
And that means we'll have millions more illegals entering our country!!
Border Policy Fight With House, Senate and Biden
House Republicans TRY TO IMPEACH HS SECRETARY MAYORKAS
U.S. MEXICO BORDER
drugs
©2024 CHANDLER King Features Syndicate/NAS

# Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is defying a US Supreme Court order. That's frightening

**By ERWIN CHEMERINSKY**
Los Angeles Times

*Erwin Chemerinsky is a contributing writer to* Opinion *and the dean of the UC Berkeley School of Law. His latest book is* Worse Than Nothing: The Dangerous Fallacy of Originalism.

Texas' continuing dispute with the federal government over immigration enforcement goes to the very heart of our constitutional system. Gov. Greg Abbott, and those who are cheering him on, are challenging not only federal authority but also the power of the Supreme Court and ultimately the supremacy of the Constitution itself.

The dispute arose because Texas installed razor wire fencing along parts of the Rio Grande, among other unilateral measures at the U.S.-Mexico border. Texas officials say they did so to deter an influx of people crossing the border, many of whom are seeking asylum. The question is whether the federal government can remove the fence given its power over the border and immigration.

A panel of the conservative 5th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals prohibited the federal government from removing the razor wire except for medical emergencies. Last week, however, in a 5-4 order without an opinion, the Supreme Court granted the U.S. solicitor general's request that border agents be allowed to remove the razor wire.

That should have put the matter to rest for the time being. But the Texas National Guard and state troopers continued to put up concertina wire and block federal agents from accessing part of the border. On Wednesday, the Republican governor publicly challenged the Supreme Court's ruling, vowing to " hold the line." Abbott said Texas is under "invasion" and that the state's right to defend itself "is the supreme law of the land and supersedes any federal statutes to the contrary."

The Republican Governors Association issued a statement Thursday backing Abbott "in utilizing every tool and strategy, including razor wire fences, to secure the border." Former President Trump has also defended Abbott and called on other states to send their national guards to support Texas.

This is frightening and just wrong as a matter of law. To begin with, Article VI of the Constitution makes the federal government supreme when it is acting within its authority, deeming any contrary state policies preempted. And the Supreme Court has long held that the federal government has broad powers over immigration and the borders.

The court has frequently found that state laws seeking to regulate immigration are preempted by federal law. In the 2012 case Arizona vs. United States, for example, the court emphatically struck down an Arizona law that sought to crack down on the border and undocumented people.

Moreover, since the earliest days of the country, it's been a fundamental principle of constitutional law that states cannot interfere with the operation of the federal government, including federal law enforcement. In fact, this was precisely the argument the Trump administration made against cities that resisted cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Abbott's calling immigration an "invasion" doesn't change anything. The supremacy of federal law and the federal government doesn't cease even if there is an invasion.

While the Constitution says in Article I, Section 10, that no state shall "engage in war, unless actually invaded," the provision was meant to allow states to respond to enemy troops at a time when the federal government could be slow to respond because of the nature of communications and transportation. Nothing in the clause implies that the states may violate federal law or impede the federal government.

Nor does a state have the power to disregard or disobey a U.S. Supreme Court order. But that is what Abbott is doing in directing the Texas National Guard to prevent federal agents from taking down the razor wire. And it is distressing to see Republican governors openly cheering his lawlessness.

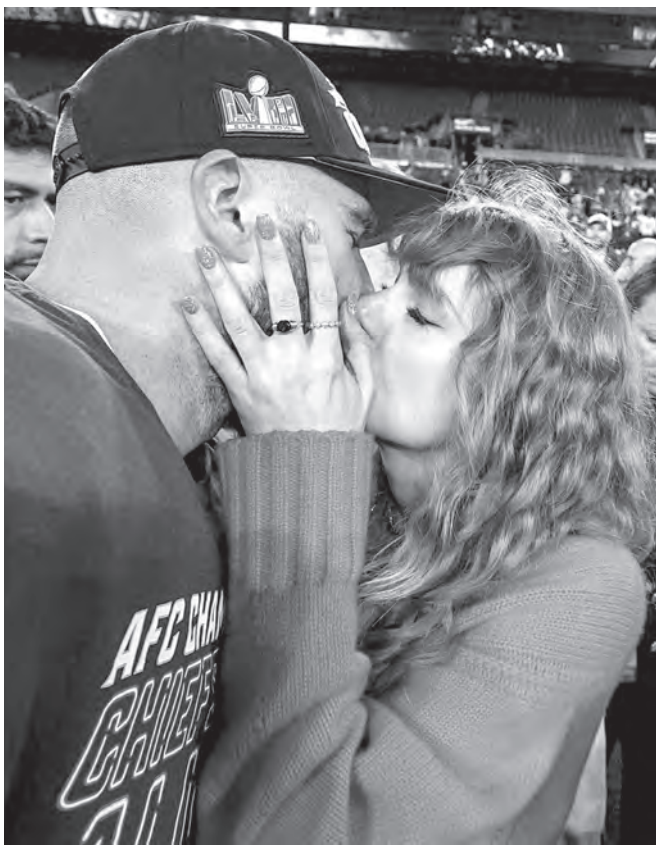
This of course is not the first time a state tried to disregard federal law. In the 1950s, Southern governors attempted to block the court-ordered desegregation of schools.

One of the most famous instances involved Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus, who deployed the state's National Guard to prevent Black students from attending Little Rock Central High School. The Supreme Court responded forcefully in Cooper vs. Aaron, holding that states have no right to disobey federal court orders in an opinion signed by all nine justices. President Eisenhower sent the federal National Guard to enforce the desegregation of the Little Rock schools.

The principle upheld then dates to the dawn of the republic and continues to apply today. If states can obstruct the federal government and ignore Supreme Court orders, the Constitution is rendered meaningless. Texas' governor is violating the Constitution, and the stakes of this standoff are great.

**EDITORIAL POLICY** Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

# How Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce became the focus of baseless political conspiracy theories



AP

Taylor Swift kisses Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce after an AFC Championship NFL football game against the Baltimore Ravens, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024, in Baltimore. The Kansas City Chiefs won 17-10.

**By MELISSA GOLDIN**
Associated Press

The budding love story featuring music superstar Taylor Swift and Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce took an unexpected turn into the world of political conspiracy theories this week after the team advanced to the Super Bowl.

Myriad baseless rumors emerged on social media—everything from claims that Swift has played a part in Pentagon psychological operations to the idea that she and her two-time Super Bowl champion boyfriend are key assets in a secret plot to help President Joe Biden get reelected in 2024. Another variant: That the Chiefs' success was rigged as part of the plan for the game on Feb. 11 in Las Vegas.

Political and media figures on the right, including former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, political activist Laura Loomer and One America News Network host Alison Steinberg, have amplified the allegations.

The claims are ludicrous and may well reflect the fear on the right that someone as famous as Swift, whose landmark Eras Tour is the first tour to cross the billion-dollar mark, could indeed influence the presidential race should she urge her legion of fans in one direction.

Pop culture and politics have long been entwined. The entertainment industry has been a deep well of political contributions. And candidates often try to draft on the celebrity of stars to add to their own allure.

The potency of the impact is less clear. In Swift's case, there is some proof that she can at minimum generate more voter registration.

In September, Swift posted a short message on her Instagram account encouraging her 272 million followers to register to vote. The post led to more than 35,000 registrations on the nonpartisan nonprofit Vote.org.

Swift's massive fan base gives her a powerful voice. An SSRS poll conducted in October 2023 found that about 6 in 10 U.S. adults called themselves at least casual fans of the singer, with 8% saying they're big fans. The poll also found that 8 in 10 U.S. adults said they had heard of her relationship with Kelce and the majority of those familiar with it considered it a real relationship, rather than a publicity stunt.

"Pop culture people identify with this stuff, they pay attention to it. And that's what moves politics now. It's attention and identity," Joel Penney, an associate professor at Montclair State University whose research includes the intersection of politics and pop culture, said. Indeed, Donald Trump's improbable march to the presidency in 2016 was propelled in part from the celebrity he gained as a reality television star.

But the false claims about Swift are of such an extreme nature that they will test the limits of how potent a conspiracy theory can be. Penney sees the recent deluge of posts aimed at Swift as an attempt to preemptively blunt her impact by discrediting her.

Penney said Swift's influence could prove a difficult force to contend with, especially if she publicly supports Biden, as she did in the 2020 race.

The attacks on Swift could also galvanize young voters who want to rally around her.

"Young people are fighting their political battles through a language drawn from pop culture," said Henry Jenkins, a professor at the University of Southern California who also studies politics and pop culture. "That's what connects them. That's what they're engaged with."

Both Swift and Kelce have made public statements about politics and other issues that put them at odds with the far-right.

Swift broke her long-standing refusal to discuss her political views in 2018 when she announced in an Instagram post that she would be voting for Tennessee's Democratic Senate candidate Phil Bredesen and Democratic House incumbent Rep. Jim Cooper. She also slammed then-U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn, the Republican candidate, citing Blackburn's opposition to certain LGBTQ+ rights and her vote against the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in 2013. Blackburn won election to the Senate.

In 2020, Swift endorsed Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris in an interview with V Magazine, noting that "under their leadership, I believe America has a chance to start the healing process it so desperately needs."

Kelce faced criticism in September for appearing in an ad promoting the double dose of the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The ad was part of a partnership with Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company that developed a vaccine in response to the pandemic and has since become a common mark for anti-vaccine activists and conspiracy theorists.

Pop culture figures and the industry that surround them have been enmeshed in political campaigns long before the duo some fans refer to as Swelce. Former President Bill Clinton first appeared on MTV during his 1992 campaign while he was still governor of Arkansas. Major stars including Johnny Cash, Mary Tyler Moore and Willie Nelson endorsed former President Jimmy Carter more than 40 years ago when he made his second run for the White House. Ronald Reagan got his start in politics after a career as an actor.

"That question of, does this stuff work in pop culture? It absolutely can," Penney said. "And it does. And history has shown that."

# Society needs to take a breather

**By KEVIN FRAZIER**
The Fulcrum

*Kevin Frazier is an assistant professor at the Crump College of Law at St. Thomas University. He previously clerked for the Montana Supreme Court.*

Patience is a virtue. It's a simple refrain I learned well in Mrs. Campbell's class—rather than read the instructions on a pop quiz, I rushed to start answering the questions. Turns out I missed three bonus points for simply writing my name on the back of the page rather than the front. Speed, though, has become the dominant social, political and economic norm.

We need our food delivered in minutes—you can even pay to have your UberEats order prioritized over others. We need real-time updates on our social media feeds—news and nonsense from friends and foes alike, full of instantaneous "hot takes" rather than reasoned analysis. We demand our politicians deliver progress on our ideological aims now—candidates jockey to be viewed as the one most likely to succeed on short-term policy goals and partisan preferences. And, we expect and encourage companies to compete to be the "first mover" instead of the "steady and responsible actor."

It's time to slow things down. We need to resist our urge to act with haste. So here are a few suggestions for how we can exercise more patience—and, by doing so, save some lives, improve our politics and enhance our discourse.

First, let's lower the speed limit just about everywhere and let's enhance the use of automated ways to ticket those who prioritize their speed over the safety of others. It's not rocket science that fewer bad things can happen when cars move slower—but don't take my word for it. Instead, consider that officials in Edmonton, Canada, saw a 50% drop in fatal and injurious crashes following a 6 mph drop in the speed limit. These benefits can come at relatively low cost, too. The European Union mandated the use of intelligent speed assistance systems in all new cars to increase driver awareness of excessive speeds and to ease enforcement. We can and should do the same in the United States.

Next, let's consider granting our elected officials a single, longer term. Imagine if senators only served a single, eight-year term. Do you think they might reevaluate how they spend their time in office? I sure do. Rather than waste a third or half of their day calling donors, they could spend more time talking with their colleagues about substantive reforms. And, in place of prioritizing bills they know will please their "base," they can more thoroughly consider legislation that may not score political points but will nevertheless further the public interest.

Finally, let's turn to social media. This may be the most obvious place where our addiction to speed has caused poor social outcomes. Speaking from unfortunate personal experience, I know that it can feel impossible to pull away from the drama and debates that endlessly populated my apps. And you may be able to relate to my temptation to post hot takes just to see how folks respond. Those urges are understandable because that's what the apps are built to do. We can and should advocate for more responsible platform design. The Prosocial Design Network, a community of behavioral science and design experts, has a menu of proven strategies that platforms can incorporate to make their respective feeds more aligned with quality deliberation—ideally platforms would voluntarily adopt these straightforward approaches for a better social media experience.

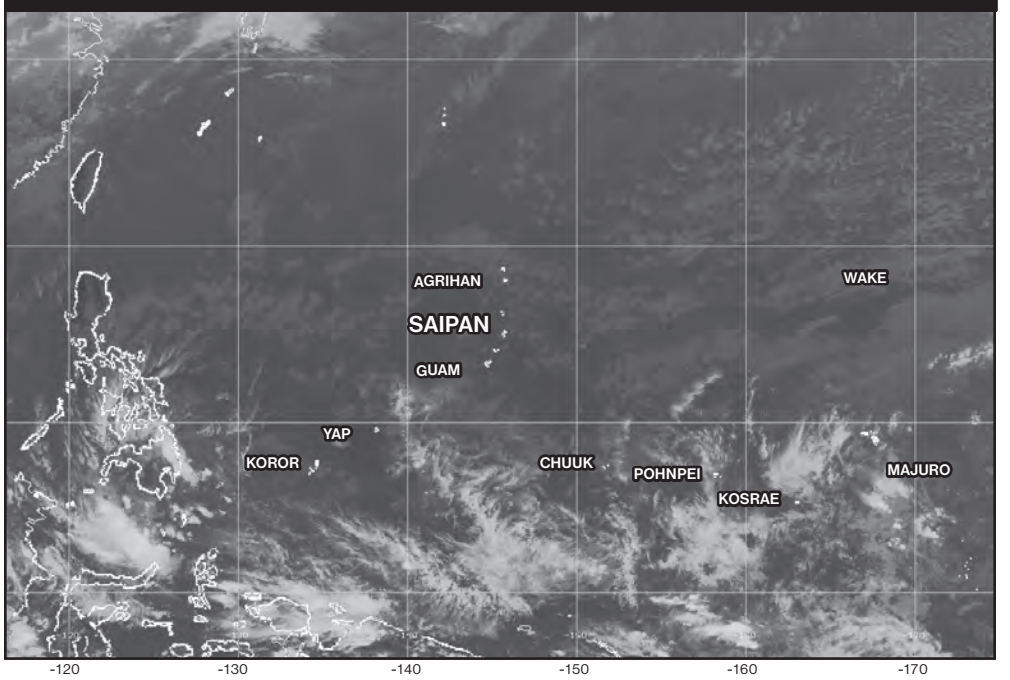
Realizing a slower society won't be easy. The steps mentioned above, though, can help create space for safer streets, a more responsive democracy and a more deliberative social media ecosystem. Here's to moving slowly and thinking about things

# The Weather

## 5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

| TODAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Breezy. Partly sunny with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph. | Breezy. Partly sunny with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph. | Breezy. Partly sunny with isolated showers. Northeast winds 20 to 25 mph. | Breezy. Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of light showers. | Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of light showers. |
| 85 / 74° | 85 / 74° | 85 / 74° | 84 / 74° | 84 / 74° |

## YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE




**PICTURE TIME: 7:12 AM THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024**

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite shows open cell stratocumulus moving through the Marianas Waters, indicating cooler and drier mid latitude air. The buoys reveal combined seas of 7 to 10 feet composed of a northeast swell and a north-northeast swell, with northeast wind waves mixed in.

*Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/*

| MICRONESIA | | ▲ ▼ °F |
|---|---|---|
| Guam and Rota | Partly Cloudy/Wind | 84° / 75° |
| Palau | Cloudy | 84° / 80° |
| Yap | Partly Cloudy | 84° / 78° |
| Chuuk | Partly Cloudy | 86° / 80° |
| Pohnpei | Showers | 84° / 80° |
| Kosrae | Showers | 84° / 80° |
| Majuro | Showers | 85° / 79° |

| AROUND THE GLOBE | | ▲ ▼ °F |
|---|---|---|
| Auckland | Partly Cloudy | 75° / 59° |
| Beijing | Fair | 35° / 22° |
| Hong Kong | Partly Cloudy | 71° / 66° |
| Honolulu | Partly Cloudy | 79° / 65° |
| London | Showers | 48° / 39° |
| Los Angeles | Mostly Cloudy | 68° / 53° |
| Manila | Partly Cloudy | 86° / 73° |
| Melbourne | Sunny | 81° / 55° |
| Miami | Partly Cloudy | 78° / 68° |
| New York | Cloudy | 39° / 32° |
| Osaka | Mostly Cloudy | 53° / 47° |
| Paris | Showers | 57° / 46° |
| Busan | Cloudy | 57° / 45° |
| Rome | Cloudy | 61° / 54° |
| Salem | Partly Cloudy | 69° / 47° |
| San Francisco | Mostly Sunny | 42° / 22° |
| Seoul | Haze | 50° / 26° |
| Tokyo | Mostly Cloudy | 61° / 47° |
| Washington, DC | Fair | 44° / 38° |

| DAY | SUNRISE | SUNSET |
|---|---|---|
| Today | 6:46 AM | 6:15 PM |
| Saturday | 6:45 AM | 6:15 PM |
| Sunday | 6:45 AM | 6:16 PM |
| Monday | 6:45 AM | 6:16 PM |
| Tuesday | 6:45 AM | 6:17 PM |

| DAY | MOONRISE | MOONSET | MOONRISE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Today | - | 11:13 AM | - |
| Saturday | 12:10 AM | 11:51 AM | - |
| Sunday | 1:02 AM | 12:34 PM | - |
| Monday | 1:59 AM | 1:23 PM | - |
| Tuesday | 2:59 AM | 2:19 PM | - |

| TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY | | FEET |
|---|---|---|
| 12:11 AM | High Tide | 1.20 |
| 5:54 AM | Low Tide | 0.64 |
| 12:11 PM | High Tide | 1.58 |
| 7:28 PM | Low Tide | 0.30 |

**NEWS DESK** For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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## FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 2024

### DEPARTURES

**SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA076 | 9:50AM | 10:35AM | Daily |

**SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA824 | 7:05AM | 9:45AM | 1, 3, 5 |

**GUAM-MANILA (MNL)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PR 111 | 5:55AM | 7:55AM | Daily |
| UA193 | 7:50PM | 11:50PM | 2, 5 via Palau |
| UA183 | 7:55PM | 9:50PM | Daily |

**SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| OZ626/703 | 3:10AM | 10:30PM | 4, 7 via ICN |
| 7C3403/2305 | 4:40AM | 10:20PM | Daily |
| UA076/183 | 9:50AM | 9:50PM | Daily via Guam |
| UA076/193 | 9:50AM | 11:50PM | 2, 5 via Guam, Palau |

**SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| TW308 | 2:15AM | 6:10AM | Daily |
| OZ626 | 3:10AM | 6:55AM | 4,7 |
| 7C3403 | 4:40AM | 8:35AM | Daily |
| 7C3461 | 2:40PM | 6:45PM | Daily Feb 7-16 only |
| 7C3405 | 4:35PM | 8:25PM | Daily |

### ARRIVALS

**GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA174 | 8:00AM | 8:45AM | Daily |

**NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA825 | 9:25PM | 2:00AM+1 | 2, 4, 7 |

**MANILA (MNL)-GUAM**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA189 | 00:40AM | 6:30AM | 3, 6 |
| PR110 | 10:05PM | 3:55AM+1 | Daily |
| UA192 | 10:40PM | 6:30AM+1 | 2, 5 via Palau |
| UA184 | 10:55PM | 4:45AM+1 | 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 |

**MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA189/174 | 00:40AM | 8:45AM+1 | 3, 6 via Guam |
| OZ702/625 | 12:05PM | 1:40AM+1 | 3, 6 via ICN |
| UA192/174 | 10:40PM | 8:45AM+1 | 2, 5 via Palau, Guam |
| UA184/174 | 10:55PM | 8:45AM+1 | 1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam |
| 7C2306/3462 | 11:15PM | 1:30PM+1 | Daily Feb 7-16 only |
| 7C2306/3406 | 11:15PM | 3:30PM+1 | Daily |

**INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7C3462 | 08:00AM | 1:30PM | Daily Feb 7-16 only |
| 7C3406 | 10:10AM | 3:30PM | Daily |
| TW307 | 7:45PM | 1:15AM+1 | Daily |
| OZ625 | 8:20PM | 1:40AM+1 | 3, 6 |
| 7C3404 | 10:15PM | 3:35AM+1 | Daily |

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

## STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

**SAIPAN TO ROTA**

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1301 | SAIPAN | ROTA | 08:30 | 09:00 | Daily |
| 1302 | SAIPAN | ROTA | 10:30 | 11:00 | Daily |
| 1303 | SAIPAN | ROTA | 15:30 | 16:00 | Daily |

**ROTA TO SAIPAN**

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3101 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 9:30 | 10:00 | Daily |
| 3102 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 11:30 | 12:00 | Saturday & Sunday |
| 3103 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 13:30 | 14:00 | Monday To Friday |
| 3104 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 16:30 | 17:00 | Daily |

**ROTA TO GUAM**

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3401 | ROTA | GUAM | 11:30 | 12:00 | Monday To Friday |

**GUAM TO ROTA**

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4301 | GUAM | ROTA | 12:30 | 13:00 | Monday To Friday |

**SAIPAN TO TINIAN**

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1201 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 7:30 | 7:45 | Daily |
| 1202 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 8:00 | 8:15 | Daily |
| 1203 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 9:00 | 9:15 | Daily |
| 1204 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 10:00 | 10:15 | Daily |
| 1206 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 14:00 | 14:15 | Daily |
| 1207 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 15:00 | 15:15 | Daily |
| 1208 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 16:00 | 16:15 | Daily |
| 1209 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 17:00 | 17:15 | Daily |

**TINIAN TO SAIPAN**

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2101 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 8:00 | 8:15 | Daily |
| 2102 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 8:30 | 8:45 | Daily |
| 2103 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 9:30 | 9:45 | Daily |
| 2104 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 10:30 | 10:45 | Daily |
| 2106 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 14:30 | 14:45 | Daily |
| 2107 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 15:30 | 15:45 | Daily |
| 2108 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 16:30 | 16:45 | Daily |
| 2109 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 17:30 | 17:45 | Daily |

# Healthy Choices, Healthy You

## Latte Built can get you to your fitness, health goals

By TERI M. FLORES
CORRESPONDENT

The internet meme is on point and quite telling: "However rich you are, getting fit is not something you can pay someone else to do for you."

Derek Cutting, owner and founder of Latte Built on Saipan, said as much: Commitment and determination are the first steps toward healthy living. True.

Choosing a fitness regimen may seem an easy task, but finding one that works for you is more complex. Among the options available for those who want to maintain regular physical activity is to work out at home with help from fitness apps or personal exercise equipment. Or by following along to a YouTube video. Others prefer outdoor exercises such as walking, running, or cycling, among other pursuits. But there are those who find joining a fitness club or a gym more helpful. Regardless of how you want to get fit and live healthier, they key is consistency.

"Getting healthy, fit, and in shape will not come easy. Just commit. Health and fitness are a lifestyle so don't let it get you down if you slip or make a mistake because no one is expected to change everything perfectly on day one," said Cutting in his advice to those who want to begin a fitness regimen.

For those considering joining a gym this year, Latte Built may be the right fit for your needs as there is more to Latte Built than exercise.

Owned and operated by Cutting with his wife, Tania Chong Cutting, and Makai Cutting, Latte Built is Saipan's first 24-hour gym. Founded in 2015 right after Typhoon Soudelor devastated Saipan, Latte Built started as a bootcamp in the park. Cutting says the original thought behind the gym's business philosophy is to help the community discover the fun in fitness.

Cutting's passion for health and fitness began at 22 when he decided to turn his life around after growing up being teased and bullied for being overweight. Bodybuilding became his passion.

"My fitness journey taught me how to take back my power and control my health. I began to finally feel what it was like to be confident in my own skin. Committing to healthy living has changed not just my body but every aspect of my life. It was also the moment I wanted to help others, because I knew how it feels to be down and out about yourself," said Cutting.

Cutting said the aspect of turning his health and wellness journey into a business came later once he had set up a plan to get certified as a trainer and started to help others.

Latte Built stands on the philosophy of promoting health, fitness, and well-being. "We constantly reinvest as much as possible into the business. The bigger we grow, the more we can help more people."

Latte Built is more than exercise. Offering programs and services suited for beginners and seasoned fitness enthusiasts alike, the gym exudes a familial and friendly vibe, with members supporting and encouraging each other to meet and succeed in their fitness and wellness goals.

First-time gym-goers may find the atmosphere a bit intimidating, with either the sight of a lot of fitness equipment constantly in use by members or fitness classes conducted by any of the gym's instructors.

But behind the sound of moans, the yelling and the howls, Cutting describes Latte Built's culture and vibe to be that of "a group of likeminded people who find nothing but praise, encouragement, and support from all the Latte Built *familia*. Members make friends quickly here with likeminded individuals."

What makes Latte Built the ideal place for those who want to improve their fitness and wellness are the newest and most up-to-date fitness equipment one can find in the Marianas. By this standard alone, Latte Built's patrons have given the gym the honor of being the "Best Fitness Facility" in the Marianas.

"We have virtually everything one could ask for—bodybuilding, Crossfit, Olympic, Power, yoga, Spin, cardio, functional, HIIT [High-Intensity Interval Training] and others. You could say we have it all, but you'll have to experience these for yourself," said Cutting.

One of the new services that Latte Built is proud to offer is the first-of-its-kind on Saipan known as the "Recovery Spa," which has a commercial infrared sauna and a commercial cold-plunge tub.

There is also a line of free fitness classes available to all gym members regardless of their tier membership, ranging from yoga, spin class, K1 Boxercize, Barbell (Crossfit), 5am HIIT, Intro to Strength, and Recovery Hour. Cutting says within the year, additional classes will soon be added to the gym's offerings.

Latte Built is also known to be the only gym with a huge area of indoor padded custom functional turf, which are used for classes and by individual members.

In addition, the gym also allows "true" Olympic and power lifting, with several 2" raised Olympic platforms, giving members the ability to drop the barbell after a lift.

Latte Built currently has 11 certified Personal Trainers who hold several certifications known as "Elite Fitness Trainer." With years of professional experience under their belt, all the gym's trainers are CPTs, with each trainer having a different expertise.

Their specializations range from weight loss, performance enhancement, USA weightlifting, and corrective exercise, to world obstacle racecourse. On top of these, several Latte Built trainers also pride themselves for their knowledge in Kinesiology rehabilitation sciences, NASM virtual coaching, nutrition, and sports coaching.

While each trainer brings their own unique training style and area of expertise, all of them are committed to ensuring safe and effective workouts.

For newcomers, signing up for a gym membership is the best way to start.

"Try out all the classes we offer at Latte Built, which are included free with membership. Pick the Top 2 classes you enjoyed, then commit yourself to making it on time each day and time those classes meet. Our instructors will do the rest, all you need to do is follow along," Cutting said.

By taking the classes, one eventually learns how to use the equipment properly, giving students the confidence to go and create their own workout plan.

For those who prefer to work out on their own, Cutting recommends taking a "virtual coach" for every day they are at the gym. Simply scan the QR code on each machine.

"Each QR code is unique, which brings the student to the exact video on Latte Built's YouTube channel explaining the proper way to use a machine. This method eventually gives the student the confidence to move from one machine to another since they know exactly how to set it up for themselves," explained Cutting.

Motivation and self-discipline are key to those who want to either continue or kick-start their fitness program. Procrastination will always rear its ugly head and there is always a convenient excuse to skip exercise or the gym.

By joining the gym, "half of the battle has already been won. The other half of the battle is understanding that motivation does not last because it comes and goes. It's during those days when you don't feel like going that…you need to rely on self-discipline and just go! Think of why you started, dig deep, and commit!" Cutting said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Latte Built has an impressive lineup of the newest and most up-to-date fitness equipment one can find in the Marianas.

For those who want to rev up what has become a monotonous and unexciting fitness regimen, Cutting says making a simple list of one's strengths and weaknesses based on one's original fitness goals may help restore interest in fitness.

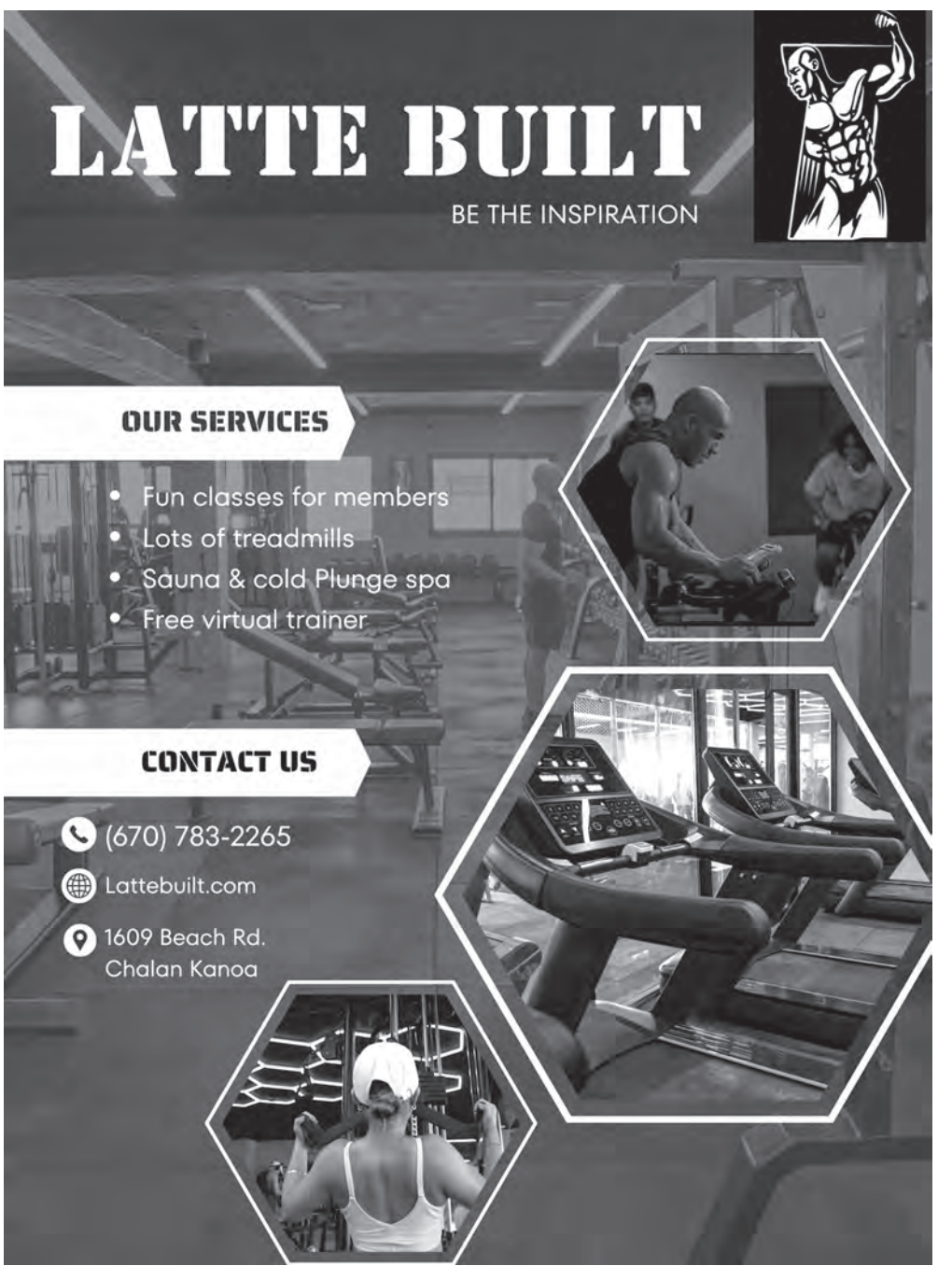
"There is no single cookie cutter plan that fits everyone. Each person has their own unique interests, abilities, and goals. Reassess and consider the original intent of your fitness regimen, your achievements and what you still need to reach that goal," reminds Cutting.

Overall, willpower and the commitment to continuously work toward one's goals are what it takes to achieve fitness and wellness, he said. "After all, borrowing from coach Tony Robbins himself, 'There is no such thing as failure, there are only results.'"

Cutting shares the following tips to achieving a new and healthy lifestyle:

- Make a promise that you will never go back and quit on yourself.
- Decide on what you want to make a change and why.
- Commit to creating one good habit each week. For example, drink five 5 glasses of water instead of just one; drink only two beers instead of a six-pack or go for a walk each day after work.

See LATTE on Page 12



# Garapan Restaurant Café and Grill's healthier plate for a healthier you

By TERI M. FLORES
CORRESPONDENT

In the hustle and bustle of today's world, planning, cooking and even eating a hearty and nutritious meal has become a tedious task with many resorting to fast food to satisfy our hunger.

Those days may finally be over for those of us who still prefer home-cooked meals over the usual cheeseburger, chicken nuggets and fries with the introduction of Garapan Restaurant Café and Grill's Healthy Meals.

Known for its cuisine that masterfully blends the flavors of Japan and the island and their refreshing beverages, Garapan Restaurant Café and Grill is now offering a meal prep service that is both nutritious and affordable.

"At our restaurant, we have consistently done our utmost to offer meals that embody this balance. Our dishes are thoughtfully crafted to include a combination of vegetables, protein, and carbohydrates, ensuring a well-rounded and nutritious dining experience," said chef and owner Ken Tanzawa.

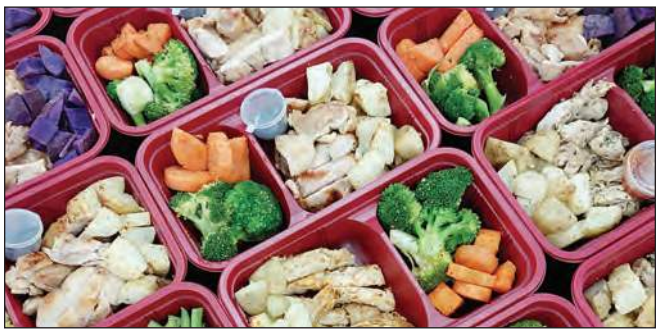
Built around a base of fresh ingredients, Garapan Restaurant's Healthy Meals feature a low sodium/lean meal plan that embodies the balance and health-giving benefits that Japanese cuisine is known for. These personalized meal plans cater to the unique goals of each customer.

"Whether the aim is weight loss, weight maintenance, or muscle gain, we are dedicated to meeting the nutritional needs of every person by carefully selecting and preparing ingredients," said Tanzawa.

Healthy Meals cost just $99 for a total of nine meals—three meals for three days. That translates to just $11 per meal. The menu consists of a serving of chicken, salmon/local mahi-mahi for protein, mixed vegetables, potato, or sweet potato.

"Our aim is to support individuals in their journey toward a healthier lifestyle. Whether you're an athlete or a senior citizen, anyone who desires to shed pounds, maintain a healthy weight, or build muscle while ensuring the body receives an optimal amount of essential nutrients is welcome," Tanzawa said.

The meal prep service came about after Tanzawa's current jujitsu student sought his help in creating a meal plan to help prepare for competitions.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Built on a base of fresh ingredients, Garapan Restaurant's Healthy Meals feature personalized meal plans that cater to the unique goals of each customer.

"In our fast-paced world, we noticed that our own eating habits were becoming unhealthy. Juggling the demands of cooking for our customers left us drained by the time we had to prepare meals for ourselves," he said.

Rising food costs coupled with the limited number of healthy dining venues on the island were more than enough reasons for Tanzawa to venture into offering this meal prep service.

Tanzawa's goal is to make Heathy Meals the affordable, convenient and healthier choice for local families and the community.

"Overall, sticking to a well-planned meal regimen promotes a healthier lifestyle while allowing an individual to achieve nutritional balance. It also simplifies the process of making nutritious food choices."

Tanzawa says the benefits of a well-balanced diet includes:

■ **Consistency**: Eliminating the guesswork and potential for unhealthy food choices ensures consistency in consuming balanced and nutritious meals.

■ **Weight management**: With portion control and a variety of nutrient-dense foods, managing calorie intake and achieving weight loss or maintenance goals becomes easier.

■ **Nutritional balance**: A balanced intake of essential nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats helps support overall health, boosts energy levels, and improves bodily functions.

■ **Time-saving**: Preparing meals in advance is not just a time saver but also helps one avoid last-minute decisions about what to eat. This can minimize stress and makes it easier to stick to one's dietary goals.

■ **Improved portion control**: Following a meal plan can help in the development of healthier eating habits, including better portion control. This can prevent overeating and promote a more mindful approach to food consumption.

■ **Enhanced performance:** For athletes or individuals focused on fitness goals, a well-planned meal plan can provide the necessary nutrients to optimize performance, enhance recovery, and support muscle growth.

Tanzawa believes the time is right to support fitness and wellness, which a well-balanced and nutritious diet offers.

"The time for change has arrived. …As we step into the new year, there couldn't be a more perfect opportunity to embark on a journey toward improved health and well-being. Investing in your own health is the ideal way to start the year off strong," he said.

To sign up for Healthy Meals, message Garapan Restaurant Café & Grill on Instagram @garapanrestaurant670 or call (670) 233-7000. Orders for Healthy Meals is limited to ensure quality.

Garapan Restaurant Café and Grill is located on the first floor of Pacific Sunrise Building, Coral Tree Avenue across Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan and Hyatt Regency Saipan in Garapan.

It is open from Sunday through Friday from 11am to 1pm for lunch and from 6pm to 8:30pm for dinner.

## LATTE

*From page 11*

■ Invest in yourself, educate yourself and, most importantly, understand that there needs to become the "new you".

Latte Built is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week for all members. Staff hours are Monday to Friday, from 8am to 7pm and Saturdays from 8am to 2pm. More information about their services are available at lattebuilt.com or call (670) 235-2265. The gym is located directly across the Aquarius Hotel in Chalan Kanoa, Saipan.

**"Apart from education, you need good health, and for that, you need to play sports."** *-Kapil Dev, Athlete*

Tan Holdings

HEALTH IS WEALTH

Tan Siu Lin Foundation

# Business

# Saipan Chamber of Commerce board of directors installed

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce installed its new board of directors and board officers during the Chamber's Annual Business Person of the Year Gala last Saturday night at the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

Joseph Guerreo, owner of Naked Fish Bar & Grill, was reelected as its president, Joshua Wise of PHI Pharmacy is the vice president, Janice Tenorio of IT&E is the treasurer, and Donna Krum from Friends First Marketing is the secretary.

The rest of board includes Alex Sablan of TanHoldings, Velma Palacios from IT&E, Ron Smith of Angil Designs, John Arroyo from Bank of Saipan, and Brad Ruszala of Triple J Saipan. The board members have staggered terms of two years each until 2026, while Guerrero, Tenorio, Krum, Smith, and Arroyo are serving until their term ends in January 2025.

Before the awardees of the Business Person of the Year, Small Business of the Year, Sustainable Business of the Year, Chamber Member of the Year, and Non-Profit of the Year were announced, Guerrero gave his remarks.

He thanked those who have answered his call to help last year in volunteering their time and talents into the formation of policies that affect businesses in the CNMI as they welcomed the Palacios-Apatang administration and the 23rd Legislature.

Guerrero said this year, the work continues and is humbled to be the president of the Chamber once again. "Your Chamber continues to be proactive, working with our government leaders, sharing our concerns as well as ideas and offering help to move us forward. Your Chamber continues to offer training and other opportunities to help you succeed," he said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Supreme Court Justice Perry Inos administers the oath to the newly installed Saipan Chamber of Commerce board of directors last Saturday night during the Annual Business Person of the Year Gala at the Kensington Hotel Saipan.

He said they continue to collaborate with the Northern Marianas College, the CNMI Small Business Development Center Network, Island Training Solutions, and others; and is part of an informal working group with Secretary of Labor Leila Staffler and Northern Marianas Technical Institute CEO Jodina Attao to address local labor needs.

Guerrero listed the ongoing projects and investments in education, infrastructure, and healthcare, and said that it should give CNMI hope for the future.

He then pleaded with everyone, as the CNMI continues to rebuild its No. 1 industry—tourism. "Please continue to be a part of the change before us, get involved, show interest, share your ideas."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

From left to right, Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Joseph Guerrero, board of directors Alex Sablan and Velma Palacios, treasurer Janice Tenorio, and board of directors Ron Smith and Brad Ruszala pose for a photo on stage. Not pictured is vice president Dr. Joshua Wise, secretary Donna Krum, and John Arroyo.

Guerrero went on to congratulate the board of directors and the award nominees.

Chamber executive director, Kim Camacho, at the end of the night, said, "Our annual gala is not just an event. It's a celebration of unity, collaboration, and unwavering support we receive from each and everyone of you." She thanked the volunteers, Kensington Hotel Saipan, and the event's guests, the board of directors, sponsors, donors, and supporters.

"Your contribution plays a vital role in sustaining the Saipan Chamber of Commerce, which allows us to fulfill our mission and thrive as a force for positive change in our local and business community… let's carry the spirit of collaboration, support and good vibes into the new year. We have so much planned this year," said Camacho.

One awardee, Caravan of Food owner Abed Salam C. Younis, who won the 2023 Sustainable Business of the Year, was not present to receive the award, and instead was represented by his sister, Suaad.

In an email, he said about winning the award, "We are incredibly humbled for being recognized. For me, my team at Caravan, and my family, this award carries significance. It symbolizes the impact of our collective efforts and the recognition of our mission to serve simple, honest and traditional Palestinian food while creating positive change through sustainable practices. Over the years, we have implemented various sustainable practices, including compostable packaging, energy-efficient operations, and support for local conservation initiatives like saying *adios* to the plastic straw!

He then thanked the Saipan Chamber of Commerce for the honor; his dedicated team at Caravan of Food "whose hard work and passion have been instrumental in achieving this award," and the customers and the community "for embracing and supporting our ocean-friendly restaurant initiatives."

## House passes bill to enhance child tax credit and revive key tax breaks for businesses

**WASHINGTON** (AP)—The House accomplished something unusual Wednesday in passing with broad, bipartisan support a roughly $79 billion tax cut package that would enhance the child tax credit for millions of lower-income families and boost three tax breaks for businesses, a combination that gives lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle coveted policy wins.

Prospects for the measure becoming law are uncertain with the Senate still having to take it up, but for a House that has struggled to get bills of consequence over the finish line, the tax legislation could represent a rare breakthrough. The bill passed by a vote of 357-70.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., threw his support behind the bill on Wednesday morning. He spent part of the previous day meeting with GOP lawmakers who were concerned about particular features of the bill, namely the expanded child tax credit. Some were also unhappy that it failed to address the $10,000 cap on the total amount of property taxes or state or local taxes that consumers can deduct on their federal returns. Raising the cap is a top priority of lawmakers from the Republican members of the New York congressional delegation, whose victories in 2022 helped the GOP take the majority.

Johnson committed to moving a bill that addresses the cap, but there is no bill text yet and legislation would have to move through the House Rules Committee, which leaves the timing very much in flux. Athina Lawson, a spokeswoman for Johnson, said the speaker and the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Rep. Jason Smith, R-Mo., agreed to work with lawmakers to "find a path forward."

Johnson called the tax cut bill on the House floor important, bipartisan legislation that would revive "conservative pro-growth tax reform." He also said it would bring an early end to a "wasteful COVID-era program" that has been plagued with fraud. Moving up the deadline for claiming the employee retention tax credit is expected to largely offset the cost of the tax cuts in the legislation.

Johnson also emphasized the importance of the bill moving through the House Ways and Means Committee before coming to the full House for a vote, saying it was a good example of how Congress is supposed to work.

House Republicans were anxious to restore full, immediate deductions that businesses can take for the purchase of new equipment and machinery, and for domestic research and development expenses. They argue such investments grow the economy and incentivize American companies to keep their manufacturing facilities and operations in the United States. The bill also provides businesses more flexibility in determining how much borrowing can be deducted.

"Each of these policies will help American businesses grow, create jobs and sharpen their competitive advantage against China," Smith said as debate began on the House floor.

## Federal judge dismisses Disney's free speech lawsuit vs. DeSantis

**ORLANDO, Fla.** (AP)—A federal judge on Wednesday dismissed Disney's free speech lawsuit against Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, dealing a setback to the company's hopes of regaining control of the district that governs Walt Disney World after it was taken over by the governor's appointees.

U.S. District Judge Allen Winsor in Tallahassee said in his decision that Disney lacked standing in its First Amendment lawsuit against the Republican governor and the secretary of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. The judge also said Disney's claim against DeSantis' appointees to the Disney World governing district lacked merit.

Disney said it plans to appeal the federal judge's decision. A separate lawsuit over who controls the district is still pending in state court in Orlando.

Disney had argued that legislation signed by DeSantis and passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature that transferred control of the Disney World governing district from Disney supporters to DeSantis appointees was in retaliation for the company publicly opposing the state's "Don't Say Gay" law. The 2022 law banned classroom lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in early grades and was championed by DeSantis, who had used Disney as a punching bag in speeches on the campaign trail until he recently suspended his campaign for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination.

Disney supporters had run the district, which provides municipal services such as firefighting, planning and mosquito control, for more than five decades after the Legislature created it in 1967.

# Nation

# Poll finds uptick in positive ratings of US economy

## » But it's not boosting Biden

AP

President Joe Biden speaks to members of the media before boarding Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Jan. 30, 2024.

**WASHINGTON** (AP)—Stocks are near record highs. Growth was surprisingly strong last year. And once-hot inflation has begun to cool. But so far, U.S. adults are feeling only slightly better about the economy.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that 35% of U.S. adults call the national economy good. That's an uptick from 30% who said so late last year and up from 24% who said so a year ago. While 65% still call the economy poor, that's also an improvement from a year ago, when 76% called it poor.

Voters' confidence in the economy could be a pivotal factor in this year's presidential election as it is consistently rated as a top issue. Recent data on the economy has shown that growth accelerated last year even as inflation returned closer to the Federal Reserve's 2% target, proving wrong a multitude of Wall Street and academic economists who said a recession would be the consequence of efforts to lower inflation.

President Joe Biden and his aides have taken to highlighting the economic positives as consumer sentiment has rebounded. Biden is also drawing an open contrast with former President Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner. Trump supporters remember his tenure with pride for how the economy fared, but his term was marred by job losses tied to the coronavirus pandemic.

The evidence of a stronger economy has yet to spill over into greater support for Biden. The new poll puts his approval rating at 38%, which is roughly where that number has stood for most of the past two years. Biden's approval rating on handling the economy is similar, at 35%.

Respondents interviewed for the survey often expressed their views on the economy through a personal lens. Some judged it based on their grocery bills and prices at the gasoline pump. Others assessed the economy based on their appreciating investments. Housing prices mattered, and so did job prospects for their adult children and the upward trajectory of the federal debt.

Molly Kapsner, 58, lives on a farm in Wisconsin and thinks the economy is doing "pretty well" because she has three children finishing college this year and all of them have job options. She voted for Biden in 2020 and plans to do so again.

"He has a lot on his plate right now and he's doing quite well," she said. "He's just putting his head down and doing his job and not trying to create a circus in our country."

David Veksler, who voted for the libertarian candidate, Jo Jorgenson, in 2020, said he's worried about the rising federal debt. The 43-year-old software engineer manager from Denver said the borrowing will hurt growth in the long term, even if his investments are doing well now.

"I think he's similar to his predecessors in furthering unsustainable deficits," Veksler said of Biden. "I'm as negative on him as I was on Trump."

Harry Broadnax, a 62-year-old retiree, said he increasingly thinks about the economy in relation to the increase in migrants illegally crossing the U.S. southern border. He feels their presence is diverting financial resources from U.S. citizens.

"I would like to see them block up the border like Trump wanted," said Broadnax, who is from North Carolina, adding for emphasis, "I'm a Democrat."

Broadnax doesn't see himself voting for Biden or Trump, whose criminal indictments worry him.

The Biden administration has tried to put a greater focus on the big numbers used to assess the overall economy, making its case through hard data.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, told a group of reporters last week that skeptics about the economy had overlooked how Biden's policies boosted the labor market and repaired supply chains wrecked by the pandemic.

"The big miss here was not to understand how much, by surging back into the workforce, by addressing supply chains that were completely broken, those inflationary pressures would come down," she said.

Trump has said that the economy is "fragile" and "running off the fumes of what we did." The Republican front-runner has said on social media that stocks are rising because he is likely to return to the White House. That claim overlooks the influence of the Fed, as well as the fact that average annual growth has been higher under Biden so far than it was during Trump's term.

# After bitter primary, DeSantis may struggle to win over Trump supporters if he runs again

**MANCHESTER, N.H.** (AP)—Before launching his ill-fated campaign for the White House, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was a star. Again and again, Republican voters said they saw him as the future of the party—a potential vice president who, after serving four years alongside Donald Trump, could become the party's standard-bearer and run for two terms.

But after a scorched-earth primary in which Trump pounded DeSantis viciously for the better part of a year, interviews with voters across early-voting states suggest the Florida governor may have an uphill battle if he chooses to run for president again in 2028. Many Trump supporters not only dislike DeSantis, but echo Trump's assertions that DeSantis betrayed him and say they would never consider him again.

"I think he stabbed Trump in the back," said Pamela Shinkwin, 73, who lives in Massachusetts and traveled to New Hampshire for one of the former president's final rallies before his double-digit victory in the primary. DeSantis' campaign against Trump had soured her on the governor, she said.

Mary Sullivan, 76, a retired registered nurse from Manchester, slammed both DeSantis and former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley for daring to run in the first place.

"They should never have ever tried to go against Donald Trump for what he's done for this country. I just can't even imagine," she said after stopping by Trump's campaign headquarters.

Asked if she would ever vote for the Florida governor in the future, Sullivan offered an emphatic and repeated "No."

"He doesn't deserve it," she said. "He backstabbed President Trump. If he kept on the Trump train all along, stayed in Florida, supported him, then maybe he would become, eventually, a running mate with President Trump. And like everybody says in '28. But no, he showed his true colors."

The hostility reflects the deep connection many of Trump's supporters have with the former president, a bond that Trump has harnessed to tear down rivals in the primary and influence Republicans in Congress. Whether or not Trump is elected again, he will likely wield enormous influence in future Republican contests, complicating the calculus of anyone seeking the party's nomination in 2028 or beyond.

DeSantis' allies believe the Florida governor has a clear path to another presidential bid should he want one. His current term ends in January of 2027 when he'll be just 49 years old. Pointing to national polls, they say he lost the primary not because he was unpopular with primary voters, but because those same voters liked Trump more.

# Utah is latest state to ban diversity, equity, inclusion efforts on campus and in gov't

Utah's governor signed a bill into law Tuesday that makes the state the latest to prohibit diversity training, hiring and inclusion programs at universities and in state government.

The measure signed by Spencer Cox, a Republican who previously said he supported the idea, had cleared the state House and Senate by wide, party-line majorities.

Headed into the final year of his first term, Cox has shifted to the right on "diversity, equity and inclusion." After vetoing a ban on transgender students playing in girls sports in 2022, Cox signed a bill in 2023 regulating discussion of race and religion in public schools to ban, for example, teaching that anybody can be racist merely because of their race.

He also signed a separate law Tuesday requiring people to use bathrooms and locker rooms in public schools and government-owned buildings that match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Cox previously called requiring employees to sign statements in support of workplace and campus diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, "awful, bordering on evil."

"We've been concerned about some DEI programs and policies, particularly with hiring practices, and this bill offers a balanced solution," Cox said in a statement Tuesday night.

The new law will bar universities and government from having offices dedicated to promoting diversity. They also can't require employees to submit statements of commitment to DEI.

"It ensures academic freedom on university campuses where all voices will be heard," Republican Keith Grover, the bill's sponsor in the state Senate, said shortly before the body made a final 23-6 vote in favor last Thursday.

The chamber's Democrats all voted no, citing statistics showing minority enrollment at colleges and universities trailing far behind that of white students.

Already this year, Republican lawmakers in at least 17 states have proposed some three dozen bills to restrict or require public disclosure of DEI initiatives, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

The measures have a heavy focus on higher education, but Republicans are also sponsoring ones that would limit DEI in K-12 schools, state government, state contracting and pension investments. Some would bar financial institutions from discriminating against people who refuse to participate in DEI programs.

Meanwhile, Democrats in nine states have filed at least 20 bills to require or promote DEI initiatives. They include measures to reverse Florida's recent ban on DEI in higher education and measures to require considerations in the K-12 school curriculum. Others apply to ferry workers in Washington state and a proposed offshore wind energy institute in New Jersey.

Republican-led Florida and Texas were first to enact broad-based laws banning DEI efforts in higher education last year. Other states including Iowa and Oklahoma have implemented similar measures. ***(AP)***

# Asia

## Taiwan holds military drills to defend against the threat of Chinese invasion

**KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan** (AP)—Almost every day, Chinese warships sail in waters around Taiwan and warplanes fly toward the island before turning back. What if they suddenly attacked?

Taiwan's military conducted a two-day exercise at sea, on land and in the air this week to practice defending against such a surprise attack. As journalists looked on from fast escort boats, a mine layer released at least a half dozen dummy mines from a chute in its stern.

Maj. Gen. Sun Li-fang, the chief defense ministry spokesperson, told reporters at Zuoying Naval Base in southern Taiwan that China's recent actions threaten to spark a conflict that could have devastating effects on the entire region, where billions of dollars in trade pass the 160 kilometer- (100 mile)-wide waterway separating Taiwan from China.

"Any unilateral irrational action could very easily escalate tensions and sabotage stability in the Taiwan Strait region," Sun said. "So the Chinese Communists should immediately cease these sorts of undermining actions."

China claims the self-governing island of 23 million people as its own territory and says it must come under Beijing's control. The long-running divide is a flashpoint in U.S.-China relations. As relations between the rivals have deteriorated in recent years, fears have grown that America could get pulled into a war if hostilities break out.

Later in the day, journalists witnessed a simulated attack by China at a military base in the eastern county of Taitung.

Troops in red helmets representing the People's Liberation Army parachuted in, while Taiwanese army drones buzzed overhead. Taiwanese troops soon rolled onto the training course, fighting back with M60 Patton tanks, a model first introduced to the U.S. Army in 1959 but significantly upgraded by Taiwan. Taiwan is gradually replacing some of them with M1 Abrams tanks and the HIMARS rocket system, which the U.S. has also supplied to Ukraine.

Taiwan's defense ministry, in a daily report, said that seven Chinese warplanes and four naval vessels were detected around the island in the 24-hour period ending at 6 a.m. on Wednesday. It also reported a Chinese balloon off its northern coast.

A Chinese government spokesperson criticized Taiwan's government for "creating political hype" about recent balloon sightings. Chen Binhua from the Taiwan Affairs Office said that balloons are common around the world, usually belong to private companies and are mostly used for civilian purposes such as weather monitoring.

"They have been around for a long time and are nothing new," he said Wednesday according to a transcript of a regular briefing in Beijing.

The annual exercise comes less than three weeks after voters elected Lai Ching-te as their next president, giving a third straight four-year term to the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party, which is opposed by China.

### ASIAN BRIEFS

#### Pakistan's imprisoned former PM Imran Khan is convicted again, days before elections

**ISLAMABAD** (AP)—Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was found guilty of corruption on Wednesday and sentenced to 14 years, yet another blow to the imprisoned populist leader days before his political movement attempts a return to power in parliamentary elections. It was his second conviction in as many days and the harshest yet, and was seen as part of the long-running struggle between civilian leaders and the powerful military in the troubled Western ally. Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi—who was also convicted Wednesday—were accused of retaining and selling state gifts in violation of government rules when he was in power. In addition to his prison term, Khan was disqualified from holding any public office for 10 years. His lawyer, Babar Awan, dismissed the conviction as a violation of Khan's basic rights, and said the former premier was convicted and sentenced in such a hurry that the judge did not wait for the arrival of his legal team. Khan—who in the waning days of his premiership began to challenge the country's military—was ousted from power in a no-confidence vote in April 2022. He now has more than 150 legal cases hanging over him.

#### India's navy rescues two hijacked boats

**NEW DELHI** (AP)—India's naval forces rescued an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel hijacked by Somali pirates and freed its 19-member Pakistani crew off the east coast of Somalia, a navy statement said Tuesday. Later that day, the navy said in a statement it also rescued a Sri Lankan fishing vessel, together with forces from Seychelles and Sri Lanka. The Iranian vessel Al Naeemi was rescued late Monday after the Indian navy intercepted the vessel, forcing 11 Somali pirates to release the crew and boat. It didn't immediately say what happened to the hijackers, but it posted images showing 10 pirates with their hands tied behind them and armed Indian naval troops guarding them. Another image showed some armed pirates on the vessel.

The piracy occurred in international waters about 850 nautical miles (1,570 kilometers) west of the Indian coastal city of Kochi.

The navy said in a separate statement it rescued the Sri Lankan vessel, Lorenzo Putha 04, after three pirates hijacked it 955 nautical miles (1770 kilometers) east of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. It called the operation a "coordinated multilateral response to the hijacking" but did not elaborate on who the pirates were.

#### Insurgents attack security facilities in southwestern Pakistan, killing 6 people

**QUETTA, Pakistan** (AP)—A group of insurgents armed with rockets, explosives and guns attacked security facilities in southwestern Pakistan before dawn Tuesday, killing at least four members of the security forces and two civilians, officials and the military said. At least nine insurgents were also killed in the ensuing shootout. The outlawed Baluchistan Liberation Army quickly claimed responsibility for the rocket and gun attacks, saying that two of its fighters were killed. It was an apparent retaliation for strikes by Pakistan on what it said were insurgent hideouts in Iran earlier in January. Authorities initially said the overnight attacks, in Mach district in Baluchistan, were foiled without casualties, but two local security officials and the military said four security forces and two civilians were killed and 15 members of the Pakistani security forces were wounded in multiple rocket and gun attacks. The two officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media. According to a military statement, the attackers included suicide bombers and the security forces quickly responded and killed nine assailants.

# World

## Israel, Lebanon prepping for a war neither wants

AP

An Israeli mobile howitzer gets into position near the border with Lebanon in northern Israel, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024.

**BEIRUT** (AP)—The prospect of a full-scale war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia terrifies people on both sides of the border, but some see it as an inevitable fallout from Israel's ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza.

**» But many fear it's becoming inevitable**

Such a war could be the most destructive either side has ever experienced.

Israel and Hezbollah each have lessons from their last war, in 2006, a monthlong conflict that ended in a draw. They've also had four months to prepare for another war, even as the U.S. tries to prevent a widening of the conflict.

Here's a look at each side's preparedness, how war might unfold and what's being done to prevent it.

The 2006 war, six years after Israeli forces withdrew from south Lebanon, erupted after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and killed several others in a cross-border raid.

Israel launched a full-scale air and ground offensive and imposed a blockade that aimed to free the hostages and destroy Hezbollah's military capabilities—a mission that ultimately failed.

Israeli bombing leveled large swaths of south Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. Hezbollah fired thousands of unguided rockets into northern Israel communities.

The conflict killed some 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

A U.N. resolution ending the war called for withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and a demilitarized zone on Lebanon's side of the border.

Despite the deployment of U.N. peacekeepers, Hezbollah continues to operate in the border area, while Lebanon says Israel regularly violates its airspace and continues to occupy pockets of Lebanese land.

An Israel-Hezbollah war "would be a total disaster," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned last month, amid a flurry of shuttle diplomacy by the U.S. and Europe.

Iran-backed Hezbollah seemed caught off-guard by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, a regional ally. Since then, Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged daily cross-border strikes, escalating gradually. Israel also carried out targeted killings of Hezbollah and Hamas figures in Lebanon.

## Putin vows to make military gains in Ukraine

**MOSCOW** (AP)—President Vladimir Putin vowed Wednesday to push back Ukrainian forces to reduce the threat of attacks on Russian territory as he met with activists running his campaign ahead of the March presidential election that he's all but certain to win.

Asked about plans for the military campaign in Ukraine, Putin said the line of contact needs to be pushed back to "such a distance from our territory that will make it safe from Western-supplied long-range artillery that Ukrainian authorities use for shelling peaceful cities."

He added the Russian military has been doing just that, "pushing the enemy back from vital populated centers."

"This is the main motive for our guys who are fighting and risking their lives there—to protect the Motherland, to protect our people," he added.

Ukraine has struck inside Russia recently, including a Dec. 30 attack on the border city of Belgorod that killed 25 people, injured over 100.

Putin also said Russian investigators concluded that Ukraine used U.S.-supplied Patriot air defense systems to shoot down a Russian military transport plane in the Belgorod region on Jan. 24. Russian authorities said the crash killed all 74 people onboard, including 65 Ukrainian POWs heading for a swap.

Ukrainian officials didn't deny the plane's downing but didn't take responsibility and called for an international investigation.

Putin said Russia wouldn't just welcome but would "insist" on an international inquiry on what he described as a "crime" by Ukraine.

Putin, 71, who is running as an independent candidate, relies on a tight control over Russia's political system that he has established during 24 years in power.

With prominent critics who could challenge him either jailed or living abroad and most independent media banned, his reelection in the March 15-17 presidential vote is all but assured.

# Off the Wall

## At trendy Japanese cafés, patrons cuddle with pigs

AP

Shiho Kitagawa, an executive at a mipig cafe, holds a pig Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, in Tokyo.

**TOKYO** (AP)—First there were cafés that allowed pets. Then came cat cafés, where lattes took second place to feline interaction. The latest craze in Japan: The pig café.

"It was wonderful. Very relaxing and enjoyable," said Brad Loomis, a software engineer from Pullman, Washington, after visiting Tokyo's Mipig Café with his 21-year-old daughter, Paige.

They were among dozens of customers on a recent morning, taking selfies and breaking into huge smiles. The pigs, a miniature breed, trotted about the room, looking for a cozy lap to cuddle up.

The pigs are surprisingly quiet, although they do snort now and then. They don't like to be alone, making for great companionship. Unlike the stereotype, they're very clean and don't smell.

Customers pay 2,200 yen ($15) for the first 30 minutes in the company of the pigs. A reservation is required.

"Each pig is unique. Each one has his or her own personality. You may notice one may be strong-headed, and another may be gentle," said Shiho Kitagawa, an executive at Mipig who refers to the pigs as "buta-san," using an honorific.

The Mipig Café in fashionable Harajuku is among 10 such pig cafes the operator has opened around Japan. The first one opened in Tokyo in 2019. Two more are in the works for later this year.

The animals, known as "micro pigs," don't get bigger than a corgi dog, even as adults. The cafés also feature adorable baby pigs the size of toy poodles.

Pig lovers say they make great pets. They can be purchased for about 200,000 yen ($1,350) from Mipig, have already been toilet-trained and are used to being with people. Micro pig food is also for sale. Mipig says it has sold 1,300 pigs as pets.

A drink dispensing machine is in the corner of the café, but hardly anyone was bothering to get a drink, being too occupied with the pigs.

Foreign tourists visiting the café said they found out about it on Instagram and other social media. The café does not invest in advertising. They made sure to include a visit during their trip to Japan, along with the usual tourist spots like the ancient capital of Kyoto, they said.

Australian Ben Russell smiled when a pig finally climbed into his lap. Although this was his first encounter with a real pig, they have always been his favorite animal, he said, although he wasn't sure exactly why.

Sophie Mo'unga from New Zealand, in Japan with her husband and two children, was a big hit with the pigs, with several of them fighting over her lap.

"They were cute. I think they were all keeping each other warm," she said.

The pig café is the latest in a series of animal coffee shops that have popped up in Japan, including ones that feature owls, hedgehogs, birds and even snakes.

Some people have raised ethical questions about whether the animals enjoy the experience as much as the humans.

"It must be stressful to be touched and fondled by a bunch of strangers," said Sachiko Azuma, head of Tokyo-based PEACE, which stands for Put an End to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation.

## Furry surprise in theft suspect's pocket: A tiny blue-eyed puppy

**ROSEVILLE, Mich.** (AP)—Officers in a Detroit suburb found a furry surprise as they patted down a theft suspect: A tiny blue-eyed puppy, zipped inside the man's jacket pocket.

Roseville police discovered the blue pit bull on Jan. 16 while arresting a man accused of stealing money from a bank customer.

The palm-sized female, about 5 weeks old, was taken to an animal shelter, where staff nicknamed her Bandit until they learned her name is Frappy, according to Jeff Randazzo, Macomb County's chief animal control officer. Then she was transferred to foster care before being returned to her 24-year-old owner, once he was released from jail and paid an impound fee.

Randazzo said he met with the theft suspect, offering to help with vaccines and microchipping so they can "keep an eye on this dog." Animal control is "hoping to take a bad situation and (make) it better," he told the Detroit Free Press on Tuesday.

Frappy's owner is charged with larceny from a person, accused of stealing the customer's bag containing about $5,200. He was arrested hours later, and his attorney, Robbie Lang, doesn't believe the dog was in his pocket at the time of the alleged theft.

# Science & Technology

## Are insects drawn to light? New study shows it's just confusion

AP

This photo 2022 photo provided by Samuel Timothy Fabian shows an Atlas Moth *(Attacus Iorquinii)* used to test the interaction of flying insects with artificial light is photographed at Imperial College London.

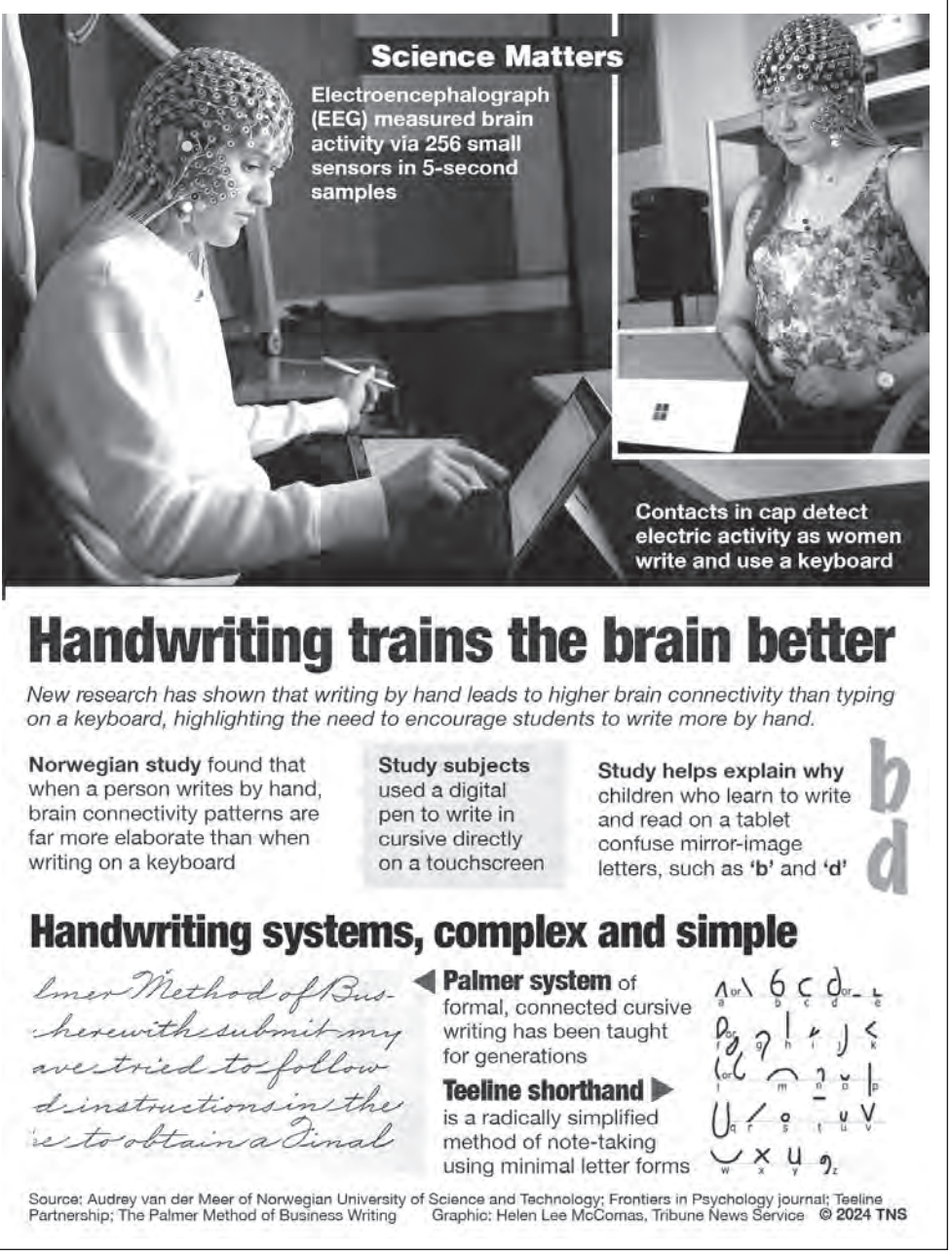
**WASHINGTON** (AP)—Like a moth to flame, many scientists and poets have long assumed that flying insects were simply, inexorably drawn to bright lights.

But that's not exactly what's going on, a new study suggests.

Rather than being attracted to light, researchers believe that artificial lights at night may actually scramble flying insects' innate navigational systems, causing them to flutter in confusion around porch lamps, street lights and other artificial beacons.

"Insects have a navigational problem," said Tyson Hedrick, a biologist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who was not involved in the research. "They're accustomed to using light as a cue to know which way is up."

Insects do not fly directly toward a light source, but actually "tilt their backs toward the light," said Sam Fabian, an Imperial College London entomologist and co-author of the study published Tuesday in the journal *Nature Communications.*


Science Matters
Electroencephalograph (EEG) measured brain activity via 256 small sensors in 5-second samples
Contacts in cap detect electric activity as women write and use a keyboard
Handwriting trains the brain better
New research has shown that writing by hand leads to higher brain connectivity than typing on a keyboard, highlighting the need to encourage students to write more by hand.
Norwegian study found that when a person writes by hand, brain connectivity patterns are far more elaborate than when writing on a keyboard
Study subjects used a digital pen to write in cursive directly on a touchscreen
Study helps explain why children who learn to write and read on a tablet confuse mirror-image letters, such as 'b' and 'd'
b
d
Handwriting systems, complex and simple
Palmer system of formal, connected cursive writing has been taught for generations
Teeline shorthand is a radically simplified method of note-taking using minimal letter forms
Source: Audrey van der Meer of Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Frontiers in Psychology journal; Teeline Partnership; The Palmer Method of Business Writing
Graphic: Helen Lee McComas, Tribune News Service © 2024 TNS

# Life & Style

## Grammy Awards host Trevor Noah on why to tune in, being nominated

**NEW YORK** (AP)—Trevor Noah is ready to face one of the toughest audiences of his career—the millions watching as he once again hosts the Grammy Awards.

"It is easily the most nerve-wracking thing that I do, but I love it every single time," Noah tells The Associated Press ahead of Sunday's telecast. "Each year there's a new highlight and a new moment that is embedded into my memory."

The 2024 Grammy Awards will air live on CBS and Paramount+ from the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles. The telecast—with SZA having a leading nine nominations—will be Noah's fourth consecutive hosting gig for the awards.

He said he's looking forward to the live performances, especially ones by nominated artists Burna Boy, Billie Eilish, Dua Lipa and Travis Scott.

"I always love seeing artists who have an innate understanding of how different and powerful the live experience is, and I think Burna Boy is one of those artists," Noah said. "He really excels in transforming live energy into a special moment in time.

"Billie Eilish has never given a half-hearted performance. Every time she's on stage, it feels like watching a vignette from a classic film. It's really thought-out and beautiful. I think Dua Lipa is one of the best pop performers of our lifetime. She does a fantastic job for this generation. Travis Scott is definitely going to be doing something crazy, so we should get ready for that. I would tune in because I think it's a good mix of predictably amazing and then unpredictably amazing as well."

CHRIS PIZZELLO
Host Trevor Noah speaks at the 65th annual Grammy Awards on Sunday, Feb. 5, 2023, in Los Angeles.

The comedian, best known for hosting Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" from 2015-22, just won an Emmy Award for best talk series for the last season of the show. He previously won one in 2017 for hosting a spin-off show, "The Daily Show—Behind the Scenes," which was voted outstanding short-form variety series.

Noah is not only a host this year—he's also a nominee, with his comedy album "I Wish You Would" up against "I'm an Entertainer" by Wanda Sykes, "Selective Outrage" by Chris Rock, "Someone You Love" by Sarah Silverman and "What's in a Name?" by Dave Chappelle.

"I've looked into all the Grammy bylaws, and there's nothing that says being the host will give you any leg up in winning the award," Noah jokes. "I think Dave Chappelle is the favorite because he's always the favorite, and rightfully so."

If that happens, don't expect Noah to be complaining that he lost the Grammy to Chappelle or that it's the second time he's lost a best comedy album Grammy to Chappelle.

"I don't understand how people live in a world where you can lose something that you never had. I've never won a Grammy. I don't have a Grammy. Unless Dave Chappelle comes to my house and takes my Grammy. I can never lose the Grammy to him," he says.

Award show hosts have had a rough few years, with The Slap marring the Oscars in 2022 and comedian Jo Koy getting critically panned at the Golden Globes earlier this year.

"In my head, it was always hard being a host. I always assumed anything could happen. I guess the very nature of comedy has always felt like that for me," says Noah. "I never blame an audience. I might not enjoy an audience, but I never blame an audience."

## Taylor Swift, Bad Bunny, others may vanish from TikTok as licensing dispute boils over

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN
Associated Press

Universal Music Group, which represents artists including Taylor Swift, Drake, Adele, Bad Bunny and Billie Eilish, says that it will no longer allow its music on TikTok now that a licensing deal between the two parties has expired.

UMG said that it had not agreed to terms of a new deal with TikTok, and plans to stop licensing content from the artists it represents on the social media platform that is owned by ByteDance, as well as TikTok Music services.

The licensing agreement between UMG and TikTok is expired as of Wednesday.

In a Tuesday letter addressed to artists and songwriters, UMG said that it had been pressing TikTok on three issues: "appropriate compensation for our artists and songwriters, protecting human artists from the harmful effects of AI, and online safety for TikTok's users."

UMG said that TikTok proposed paying its artists and songwriters at a rate that's a fraction of the rate that other major social platforms pay, adding that TikTok makes up only about 1% of its total revenue.

"Ultimately TikTok is trying to build a music-based business, without paying fair value for the music," UMG said.

TikTok pushed back against claims by UMG, saying that it has reached 'artist-first' agreements with every other label and publisher.

"Clearly, Universal's self-serving actions are not in the best interests of artists, songwriters and fans," TikTok said.

Yet Universal Music also called new technology a potential threat to artists and said that TikTok is developing tools to enable, promote and encourage AI music creation. UMG accused the platform of "demanding a contractual right which would allow this content to massively dilute the royalty pool for human artists, in a move that is nothing short of sponsoring artist replacement by AI."

UMG also took issue with what it described as safety issues on TikTok. UMG is unsatisfied with TikTok's efforts to deal with what it says is hate speech, bigotry, bullying and harassment. It said that having troubling content removed from TikTok is a "monumentally cumbersome and inefficient process which equates to the digital equivalent of "Whack-a-Mole."

UMG said it proposed that TikTok take steps similar to what some of its other social media platform partners use, but that it was met with indifference at first, and then with intimidation.

## Ex-wife uses gifts to disrupt visitation

DEAR ABBY: My ex has primary custody of our young daughter, "Kayli," and is with her 99% of the time. I have Kayli every other weekend. Her mom has been dropping her off with a bag filled with wrapped presents. These presents are marked by day and hour. Along with the presents, my ex has created multiple alarms in our daughter's phone to let her know it's time to open the presents.

I have asked her to stop doing this, as it is a huge distraction and disruption that interferes with my time with Kayli. On multiple occasions when my daughter and I are eating dinner, her alarm goes off and she gets up and leaves the table to open a present from Mom. Sometimes, she'll delay leaving the house if she knows it's almost time to open a present.

Sometimes, I turn off the alarms and silence Kayli's phone because if she's not reminded about them, she doesn't care about the presents. However, what also happens is that Mom will text or call our daughter to see if she has opened the presents. She has refused to stop this practice and replied by saying she will continue because it makes our daughter comfortable.

Kayli has been visiting my house for 10 months. This practice only started three months ago when my ex and I finally settled on a custody agreement. Besides turning off the alarms and silencing her phone, is there anything I can do to limit Kayli's mom's interference during our time together?

DISRUPTED IN THE EAST

**DEAR DISRUPTED: There is plenty you can do. Contact your lawyer and put a stop to her intentional sabotage. Your ex is trying to prevent you from building a close relationship with your daughter, and it isn't healthy for you or for Kayli.**

■■■

DEAR ABBY: My husband, "Buddy," did some HVAC work for some friends of ours. We live in California, where it can get super warm. My husband paid upfront ($600) for the expenses. He sent them an invoice, and the husband replied, "No worries, Buddy. I'll reach out to you next week."

It has been four months—and still no payment. I know my husband should not have waited this long to collect, but the couple had just bought a house, so he was trying to be sensitive to their money situation.

A few weeks ago, he sent another message with a reminder and a similar response came back: "No worries, Buddy. I will come see you Monday." Well, Monday has come and gone and NOTHING. No one wants to fight or go to court about this, but how can friends do that to other friends? Can my husband still ask for the payment? Or should he just write the money and the "friends" off?

SHOW US THE MONEY!

**DEAR SHOW US: This appears to be another example of "no good deed goes unpunished." Now that you know these "friends" lack character, cut your losses and write them (and the debt) off. Unless you have something in writing proving they owe you the money, I don't think you stand a chance in court.**

■■■

*Good advice for everyone—teens to seniors—is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)*

**DEAR ABBY**
**BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN**
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

*Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.*

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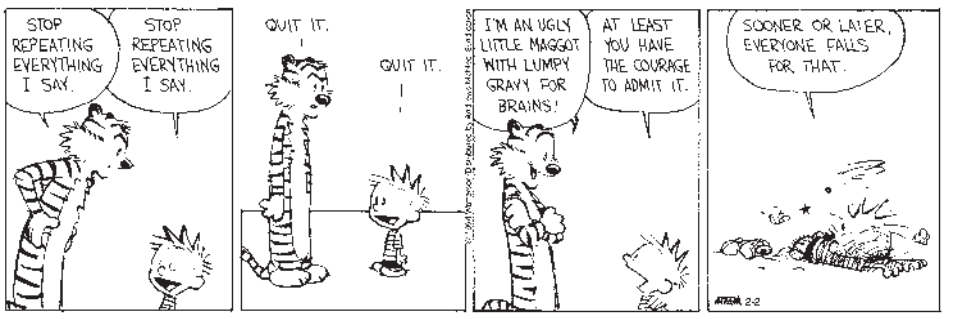
# Pastimes

## Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


STOP REPEATING EVERYTHING I SAY.
STOP REPEATING EVERYTHING I SAY.
QUIT IT.
QUIT IT.
I'M AN UGLY LITTLE MAGGOT WITH LUMPY GRAVY FOR BRAINS!
AT LEAST YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO ADMIT IT.
SOONER OR LATER, EVERYONE FALLS FOR THAT.

## Garfield®

By Jim Davis

I'M MAKING A LIST OF EXCITING THINGS I WANT TO DO!
MAY I SEE?
"DRIVE THREE MILES OVER THE SPEED LIMIT"
JON ARBUCKLE, THRILL SEEKER
JIM DAVIS 2-2

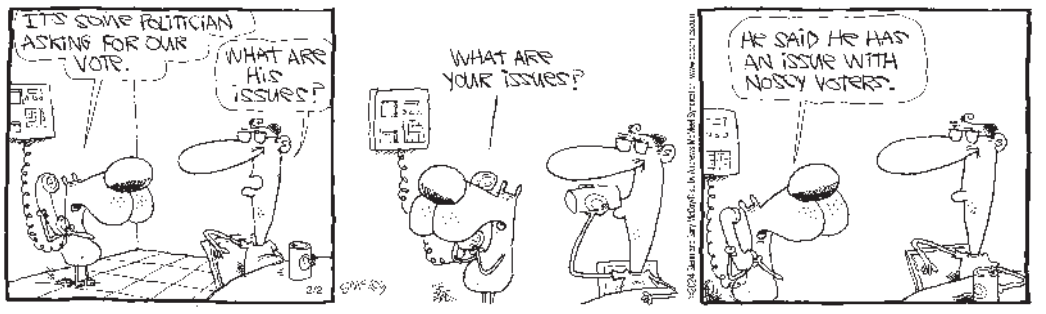
## Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

HOW HAVE I NEVER HEARD OF SNOW WEASELS BEFORE? I'M AN ADULT!
WELL, YOU'RE NOT WHAT SOME WOULD CALL "WELL-INFORMED."
OH! I JUST SAW ONE!
THERE'S ANOTHER ONE!
GIMME THE SPRAY! LET'S SET UP A PERIMETER!
BRING IT ON, ICE FERRETS!!

## The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy




## CROSSWORD

*By Eugene Sheffer*

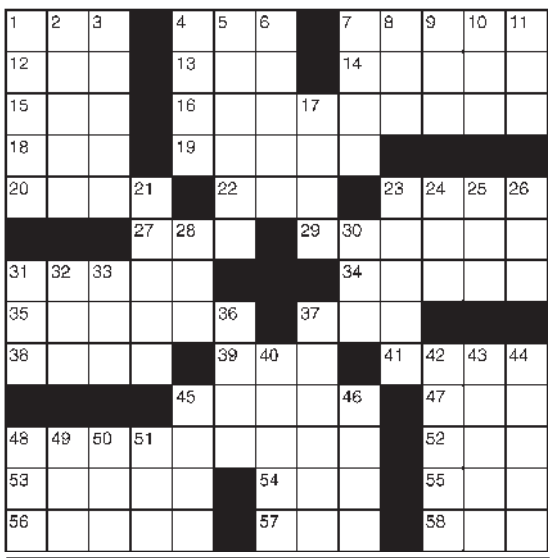
**ACROSS**
1 Financial pro
4 "Today" rival, briefly
7 Excavated
12 Young bloke
13 Popeye's Olive
14 Maine college town
15 From — Z
16 "Well, I never!"
18 Patch target
19 Site of ancient Greek games
20 Japanese instrument
22 Caviar
23 Food fish
27 "Veep" airer
29 Like Enya's music
31 Alpha's opposite
34 Port of Nigeria
35 Map key
37 Firmament
38 Rim
39 Record book suffix
41 Droops
45 Wedding setting
47 Pampering, for short
48 Ice cream variety
52 Asian language
53 Garbage
54 Shoe width
55 HIV-treating drug
56 Check recipient
57 Adobe file format
58 Collection

**DOWN**
1 Daily Planet reporter Kent
2 Barbecue site
3 Take as one's own
4 Prom dress
5 "You saved me!"
6 Texas landmark
7 "— Lisa"
8 Hot temper
9 Fish-fowl link
10 Ltr. holder
11 Female rabbit
17 Many a Billie Eilish fan
21 "Oops!"
23 Convinces
24 Witch
25 Previously
26 — Moines
28 Prohibit
30 Yellowstone grazer
31 Yucatan "Bravo!"
32 Club — sandwich
33 Ovum
36 Takeout order?
37 Warded (off)
40 Throat affliction
42 Book of maps
43 Donut coating
44 Composer Joplin
45 Tennis great Arthur
46 Coral formation
48 NASCAR sponsor
49 Mouths (Lat.)
50 Wray of "King Kong"
51 Mao — -tung

**Solution time: 25 mins.**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P | E | A | | B | L | O | B | | I | L | S | A |
| T | M | I | | R | E | N | C | | M | E | A | L |
| A | I | L | M | E | N | T | S | | P | O | K | E |
| | | | E | R | A | | O | C | E | A | N | I | C |
| D | E | H | I | D | E | | S | A | L | | | |
| F | I | O | | S | A | C | | T | A | H | O | E |
| P | I | N | A | | R | O | W | | S | A | P | S |
| P | E | S | T | S | | W | A | S | | N | I | T |
| | | | T | E | D | | D | U | N | D | E | E |
| H | O | R | I | Z | O | N | | N | O | R | | |
| C | V | E | R | | J | U | N | K | M | A | I | L |
| P | A | N | L | | O | D | I | L | | I | R | L |
| S | L | L | D | | S | L | A | N | | L | A | G |

Yesterday's answer 2-2



**STUMPED?** For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

**CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY**: Shakira, 47; Christie Brinkley, 70; Brent Spiner, 75; Graham Nash, 82.

**Happy Birthday**: Make reductions this year. Less consumerism, temptation, consumption and debt will ease stress and help you return to what's meaningful. Consider how simplicity can work in your favor. Jump at the chance to spend more time with loved ones, help those less fortunate and deal with concerns that give you a sense of pride and motivate you to make a difference. Choose to give more and use less. Your numbers are 7, 12, 24, 27, 36, 42, 48.

**ARIES** *(March 21-April 19)*: Spend more time creating and putting everything in its place and less time trying to convince others to support your goal. You'll have a more significant impact on your future if you move forward alone and prove you can call the shots and finish what you start. ✪✪✪

**TAURUS** *(April 20-May 20)*: Think before you act. Put a plan in place first if you want to be successful. Opportunity is available, and working for yourself is necessary, so choose to change whatever's essential to clear the path to victory. Celebrate with those you love and trust. ✪✪✪

**GEMINI** *(May 21-June 20)*: Talk to experts, learn all you can and consider what's valid and fits your plans. Have the confidence to follow through with your plans. Refuse to let anyone put you down or make you feel inadequate. Don't let someone take over; run the show. ✪✪✪

**CANCER** *(June 21-July 22)*: Dive in and show everyone what you can offer. Mingle, share thoughts and make plans with people who have something to contribute to reaching your goal. A change of plans will encourage an opportunity to learn, excel and share something magical with someone special. ✪✪✪✪

**LEO** *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Implementing too much too fast will slow you down. Concentrate on one thing at a time, and you'll put a dent in your to-do list. A partnership that offers excitement and temptation will weigh you down and lead to regret. Learn to say no. ✪✪

**VIRGO** *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Live and learn. Step into the mainstream and discover what's available to help you advance. Network, share your thoughts and be ready to act. The changes you make will serve you well. A change of scenery will open your eyes to new beginnings. ✪✪✪

**LIBRA** *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Stay focused on your responsibilities. Refuse to let outside influences take over or manipulate your time and skills to serve their purposes. Protect what you've worked hard to achieve, and offer alternative solutions but not your time. ✪✪✪

**SCORPIO** *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Set the record straight, say what's on your mind and move forward with gratitude and determination. Step outside your comfort zone if it will help you get the results you need to prove your point and get things done. Show leadership qualities and forge ahead. ✪✪✪

**SAGITTARIUS** *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Rely on those who have never let you down. Question anything that might jeopardize your position or reputation. Poor behavior will change how others perceive you. Be a straight shooter, put truth and loyalty first, and live up to your promises. ✪✪✪

## EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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**CAPRICORN** *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Pay attention to detail; your work will far exceed any competition you encounter. Don't brag about your accomplishments; if you proceed with confidence and determination, you'll gain the respect and opportunity you deserve. Personal growth, physical improvement and romance are in your best interest. ✪✪✪✪

**AQUARIUS** *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Take a moment to rethink what makes you happy and brings peace of mind. Fine-tune your life; a simple adjustment can make a difference. Expand your options to include laughter, learning and love, and you will enjoy and be grateful for what you create. ✪✪

**PISCES** *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Don't limit your achievements. Be innovative and use your skills uniquely, and you'll attract the people and opportunities that enable you to turn your goal into something tangible. Love and romance are in the stars, and putting your best foot forward will bring happiness. ✪✪✪✪✪

**Birthday Baby**: You are optimistic, demonstrative and changeable. You are thoughtful and proactive.

*✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.*

## SUDOKU

**Conceptis Sudoku** *By Dave Green*

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 4 | | | | 1 | 7 |
| 4 | | | | | | | | 8 |
| | | | | 7 | 3 | 5 | | |
| 6 | | 4 | 7 | | | | 3 | |
| | | 5 | 1 | 2 | | | | 9 |
| | | | 9 | | | | 7 | 5 |
| 2 | 4 | | 8 | | 1 | | | |
| | 3 | | | 9 | | 4 | | 1 |
| | | 1 | | | 7 | | 9 | |

Difficulty: ★★★★ 2/2

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

**Yesterday's Answer**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| 7 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 7 |
| 6 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 1 |
| 9 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 8 |
| 8 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 2 |
| 5 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 6 |
| 4 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 3 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 9 |

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/1

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## WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

**HOW TO PLAY:** All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

**AUTHENTICATION CODES** Solution: 7 letters

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | C | Y | F | I | T | N | E | D | I | V | L | Ⓕ | D | B |
| M | L | I | O | N | L | I | N | E | E | A | Ⓘ | U | A | Y |
| T | E | G | N | O | I | E | D | T | E | Ⓛ | E | N | T | T |
| R | S | S | O | O | S | N | A | S | Ⓔ | I | K | D | A | E |
| A | E | H | S | R | R | V | T | Y | Y | D | V | S | I | Y |
| N | C | S | L | A | I | T | N | E | D | E | R | C | R | G |
| S | U | T | M | R | G | T | C | K | R | C | N | T | E | O |
| A | R | N | P | R | B | E | H | E | O | N | U | O | B | L |
| C | I | U | E | L | I | B | O | M | L | P | E | C | M | O |
| T | T | O | O | C | L | F | P | E | N | E | H | T | U | N |
| I | Y | C | A | D | A | U | N | I | Q | U | E | O | N | H |
| O | K | C | U | S | T | B | R | O | W | S | E | R | N | C |
| N | H | A | S | E | R | V | E | R | C | A | R | D | S | E |
| E | R | P | R | O | O | F | U | N | C | T | I | O | N | T |
| F | N | O | I | T | P | Y | R | C | N | E | C | I | O | V |

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Account, Algorithm, Bank, Block, Browser, Byte, Cache, Cards, Computer, Confirm, Credentials, Data, Electronic, Encryption, File, Fraud, Function, Funds, Identify, Input, Internet, Keys, Message, Mobile, Money, Number, Online, Phone, Portal, Private, Proof, School, Seal, Security, Send, Server, Technology, Transaction, Unique, Valid, Voice

**Yesterday's Answer: Ingredient**

The NEW TELEWORD VINTAGE COLLECTION EDITION #1 can be purchased on line at www.WonderWordBooks.com. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

# Blazers spoil Damian Lillard's Portland return, 119-116

**PORTLAND, Ore.** (AP)—Anfernee Simons scored 24 points, including making a floater with 17.1 seconds left, and the Trail Blazers spoiled Damian Lillard's return to Portland with a 119-116 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday night.

Lillard had 25 points for the Bucks in their second straight loss under new coach Doc Rivers. Giannis Antetokounmpo added 27 points and eight rebounds.

Lillard played his first game in Portland since he was traded to the Bucks in the offseason. He was the face of the Trail Blazers' franchise for his first 11 seasons in the NBA.

Deandre Ayton added 20 points and 11 rebounds for Portland.

AP

Milwaukee Bucks Head coach Doc Rivers, right, speaks with guard Damian Lillard (0) during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Portland Trail Blazers in Portland, Ore., Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024.

## SUNS 136, NETS 120

**NEW YORK** (AP)—Kevin Durant scored 33 points in his return to Brooklyn, leading Phoenix over the Nets.

Durant added eight assists in his first game in Brooklyn since being traded to Phoenix nearly a year ago. He got a mixed reception early before helping take the crowd out of it with 11 points in the third quarter, when the Suns outscored the Nets 42-26 after leading by three at halftime.

Jusuf Nurkic added 28 points and 11 rebounds for the Suns, overwhelming an undersized Nets team as the Suns won for the ninth time in 11 games.

Cam Thomas scored 25 points for Brooklyn. Mikal Bridges, who came to the Nets in the Durant trade, had 21.

## TIMBERWOLVES 121, MAVERICKS 87

**MINNEAPOLIS** (AP)—Karl-Anthony Towns had 29 points and nine rebounds for Minnesota against depleted Dallas, which played without stars Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving.

Rudy Gobert scored 17 points for the West-leading Wolves (34-14). They endured a sluggish start until Towns sparked their surge with two 3-pointers in the last 35 seconds of the first half to give them the lead for good. Towns had 11 points in the third quarter.

Doncic (sprained right ankle) and Irving (sprained right thumb) both sat for the third game this season, and the Mavericks have lost all three. They've played without at least one of them 26 times in 48 games.

Josh Green had 18 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. added 14 points for the Mavericks. They shot just 6 for 29 from 3-point range against the NBA's best scoring defense.

## THUNDER 105, NUGGETS 100

**OKLAHOMA CITY** (AP)—Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 34 points to help Oklahoma City beat short-handed Denver in a matchup of teams near the top of the Western Conference standings.

Denver star Nikola Jokic sat out because of pain in his lower back. Oklahoma City took advantage of the two-time league MVP's absence by holding the defending champion Nuggets to 39.8% shooting.

Chet Holmgren had 18 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks and reserves Aaron Wiggins and Vasilije Micic each added 12 points for the Thunder.

Aaron Gordon had 16 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists and Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points and eight rebounds for the Nuggets.

## CLIPPERS 125, WIZARDS 109

**WASHINGTON** (AP)—Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points, James Harden added 25 and Los Angeles pulled away with a big third quarter to beat Washington.

Los Angeles outscored Washington 40-19 in the third after leading by 10 in the first half.

Harden's pullup 3 from the top of the arc stretched the lead to 20 for the first time with 5:42 left in the period. Later, Leonard's emphatic dunk off a driving, spinning feed from Russell Westbrook pushed it 25, and Norman Powell's basket made it 106-79 at the end of the third.

Kyle Kuzma scored 23 of his 27 points the first half for Washington. The Wizards are 2-2 under interim coach Brian Keefe after Wes Unseld Jr. was fired last week.

## CAVALIERS 128, PISTONS 121

**CLEVELAND** (AP)—Donovan Mitchell scored 20 of his 45 points in the fourth quarter, Darius Garland had 19 points in his return from a broken jaw and Cleveland held off NBA-worst Detroit.

Jarrett Allen had 14 points and 11 rebounds, and Isaac Okoro added 14 points. Cleveland won for the 11th time in 12 games and is an NBA-best 16-4 since Dec. 16.

Danilo Gallinari scored 20 points and went 4 of 4 on 3-pointers, and Cade Cunningham had 19 points and seven assists for Detroit, which was seeking its first back-to-back wins since Oct. 27-28. The Pistons are 6-41.

## HEAT 115, KINGS 106

**MIAMI** (AP)—Jimmy Butler scored 31 points and Miami beat Sacramento to end a seven-game losing streak.

Butler shot 10 of 14 from the field and had seven rebounds for the Heat, who ended their longest losing streak since dropping 15 straight during the 2007-08 season. Josh Richardson was 6 of 10 from 3-point range and finished with a season-high 24 points.

Domantas Sabonis had 19 points, 17 rebounds and 13 assists for his 13th triple-double of the season for Sacramento. Keegan Murray scored 33 points.

## PELICANS 110, ROCKETS 99

**HOUSTON** (AP)—Jonas Valanciunas scored 25 points, Brandon Ingram added 24 and New Orleans beat Houston to snap a three-game skid.

New Orleans led by five to start the fourth quarter before scoring the next 15 points to make it 99-79 with just under 6 1/2 minutes remaining. Jose Alvarado hit a 3-pointer during that stretch and Valanciunas had six points to help the Pelicans pad the lead.

Jalen Green led the Rockets with 31 points.

## MAGIC 108, SPURS 98

**SAN ANTONIO** (AP)—Paolo Banchero scored 25 points, Franz Wagner added 20 and Orlando held on to beat San Antonio.

Devin Vassell had 26 points and Victor Wembanyama 21 for San Antonio.

After trailing by 25 points in the final quarter, San Antonio went on a 15-0 run over 3:38 to pull within three at 99-96. But the Spurs had three turnovers in the final three minutes.

## BULLS 117, HORNETS 110

**CHARLOTTE, N.C.** (AP)—Coby White scored 35 points, Nikola Vucevic had 22 points and 12 rebounds and Chicago sent Charlotte to its fifth straight loss.

Ayo Dosunmu added 16 points for Chicago.

Miles Bridges had 30 points and 15 rebounds for Charlotte.

# With scoring up less than 1% over last season, NBA not seeing cause for alarm

Joe Dumars went to a game a couple of weeks ago that came down to the very last shot, and he thought it was one of the best games of the season to this point. Final score: Denver 102, Boston 100.

It was a reminder that defense still can get played in the NBA.

Amid a flurry of big individual performances—Luka Doncic scoring 73, Joel Embiid scoring 70, Devin Booker and Karl-Anthony Towns each scoring 62—in the last two weeks alone, Dumars said Wednesday that NBA officials aren't alarmed by such numbers because the league's scoring average is up only slightly compared to last season.

"It's where the game is today," said Dumars, the NBA's executive vice president and head of basketball operations. "It's the pace of the game. It's the amount of 3s guys are shooting now. You're going to have some offensive eruptions like that."

There hadn't been an instance since April 1978 of two players scoring at least 60 points in the same day. That is, until it happened twice last week: Embiid and Towns had their huge games on Jan. 22, Doncic and Booker put on their scoring shows on Jan. 26.

Having those events happen twice in the span of a few days is a statistical oddity, for certain. But the numbers show it's not really much more than that.

Scoring leaguewide this season is up just 0.78% over last season entering Wednesday, from 114.7 points per game to 115.6 points per game. The jump was far bigger last season, when scoring rose 3.7% over the rate of 110.6 points per game that the league saw in 2021-22.

There have been more high-scoring games, but the averages suggest things also tend to balance out. Entering Wednesday, there had been 78 instances of teams scoring at least 135 points in a game this season—already the second most for a full season in league history and on pace to smash the record of 112, set last season. The previous mark was 74 games of 135 or more, done in 2019-20.

"We're going to see offensive eruptions with this kind of pace and the amount of 3s people shoot," Dumars said. "But there's no push here at the league office from me or anyone else that we want to see a certain score. I left that Boston-Denver game saying, 'wow, great game.' That's what fans want. Fans want to leave a game or watch a game and at the end say, 'that was incredible.' The score is secondary to that. Fans just want to see great games." ***(AP)***

## NBA BRIEFS

### Timberwolves guard Anthony Edwards receives $40,000 fine from NBA for criticizing officials

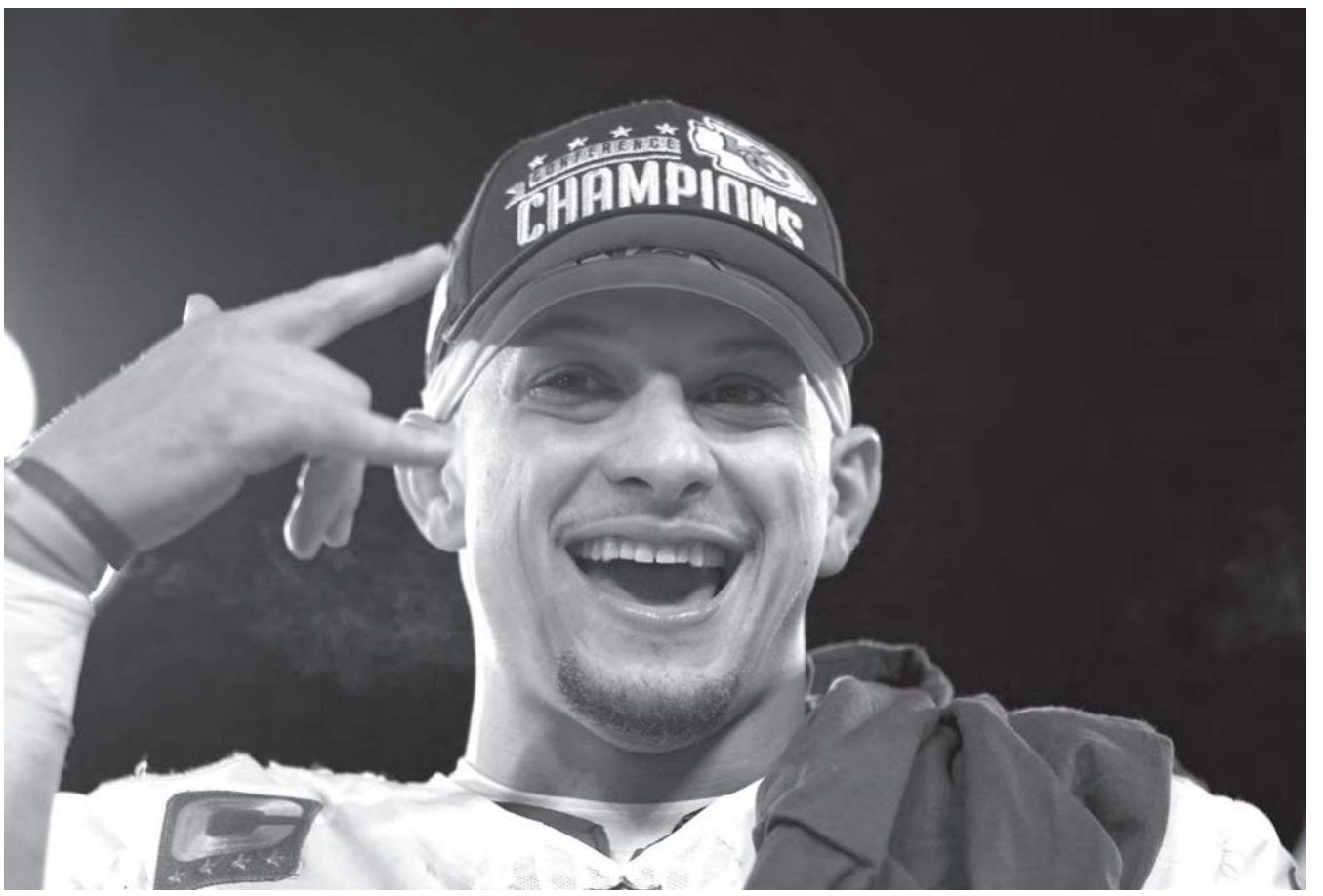
**NEW YORK** (AP)—Minnesota Timberwolves guard Anthony Edwards has received a $40,000 fine from the NBA for publicly criticizing the officiating repeatedly. The fine was handed down Wednesday in response to comments Edwards made after the Timberwolves' 107-101 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder in a Monday matchup between two of the Western Conference's top teams. "I'm going to take the fine, because the refs did not give us no calls tonight," Edwards said in an interview with Bally Sports North on the court after the game. "We had to play through every bump, every grab. I don't know, I don't know how we won tonight." Edwards continued to criticize the officiating to reporters afterward.

### Ex-NBA star Rajon Rondo arrested in Indiana on misdemeanor gun, drug charges, police say

**LOUISVILLE, Ky.** (AP)—Indiana State Police arrested two-time NBA champion Rajon Rondo on Sunday in southern Indiana on misdemeanor gun and drug charges, police said. The 37-year-old former guard was initially stopped for a traffic violation in Jackson County, police said in a news release. An investigation began Sunday afternoon after a caller said a black 2022 Tesla was traveling recklessly on I-65 South between Indianapolis and Louisville, the release added. A state trooper smelled marijuana coming from the car and an ensuing search found a firearm, drug paraphernalia and suspected marijuana, according to the release. The four-time All-Star was taken to the Jackson County Jail where he immediately posted bond and was released. A juvenile in Rondo's vehicle at the time was released to a family member. Rondo's initial court hearing has been scheduled for Feb. 27 in Jackson County Superior Court. The Associated Press could not immediately reach an attorney listed for Rondo. Rondo was prohibited from carrying a firearm because of a non-contact court order that was issued in August. It was the second protective order issued against him.

# Chiefs aim to be first back-to-back champs in 19 years

By ROB MAADDI
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER



AP

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) celebrates after the AFC Championship NFL football game against the Baltimore Ravens, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024, in Baltimore.

Repeat championships in the NFL used to be more common.

Over the first 39 Super Bowls, it happened eight times. But no team has done it since Tom Brady and the New England Patriots won two in a row following the 2003-04 seasons.

Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs are aiming to become the first back-to-back Super Bowl champs in 19 years when they face the San Francisco 49ers on Feb. 11 in Las Vegas.

The Chiefs had a chance to do it three years ago, but lost 31-9 to Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Two other teams—the 2017 Patriots and the 2014 Seattle Seahawks—also have failed in their repeat bid since the feat was last accomplished.

There hasn't been a back-to-back champion in major league baseball since the New York Yankees won three straight World Series from 1998-2000. The Golden State Warriors last did it in the NBA in 2017-18. It was accomplished more recently in the NHL with the Tampa Bay Lightning capturing the Stanley Cup in 2020-21.

Here are the NFL's repeat champions in the Super Bowl era:

## GREEN BAY PACKERS

Vince Lombardi's team won the first two Super Bowls and a few years later the iconic coach's name was put on the trophy awarded to the winner. The Packers dominated the Chiefs in the first Super Bowl on Jan. 15, 1967, winning 35-10. They followed up with a 33-14 victory over the Oakland Raiders in 1968.

Quarterback Bart Starr was the MVP in both wins. He tossed two touchdown passes against Kansas City and threw for 202 yards and one TD vs. Oakland.

## MIAMI DOLPHINS

After losing to Dallas in Super Bowl 6, the Dolphins went 14-0 in 1972 and capped off the NFL's only undefeated season with a 14-7 win over Washington on Jan. 14, 1973.

The Dolphins defeated the Vikings 24-7 the following year for the franchise's most recent Super Bowl victory. It was the second of four Super Bowl losses for Minnesota in a seven-year span.

Safety Jake Scott had two interceptions and was the MVP in the win over Washington. Larry Csonka ran for 145 yards and two scores to earn MVP honors against Minnesota.

## PITTSBURGH STEELERS

Chuck Noll, Terry Bradshaw and the Steel Curtain won their first of four Super Bowls in six years, defeating Minnesota 16-6 on Jan. 12, 1975, in Super Bowl 9. Franco Harris was the MVP of that game after rushing for 158 yards and one TD.

The Steelers beat the Dallas Cowboys 21-17 the following season. Lynn Swann earned MVP honors with four catches for 161 yards and one TD.

Pittsburgh's bid for a three-peat fell two games short when the Steelers lost the AFC championship game to eventual champion Oakland in December 1976.

The Steelers returned to the Super Bowl following the 1978 season and again defeated Tom Landry, Roger Staubach and the Cowboys 35-31. Bradshaw threw for 318 yards and four TDs to win the MVP award.

Pittsburgh defeated the Los Angeles Rams 31-19 on Jan. 20, 1980, to repeat. Bradshaw again was the MVP after throwing for 309 yards and two TDs.

## SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

Joe Montana, Jerry Rice and the 49ers capped off the 1980s with their third and fourth titles in the decade. The Niners defeated Cincinnati 20-16 on Jan. 22, 1989, beating the Bengals in a Super Bowl for the second time. Rice was the MVP after catching 11 passes for 215 yards and one TD.

The 49ers routed Denver 55-10 to win it again the next season. Montana had 297 yards passing and five TDs to earn his third Super Bowl MVP award.

## DALLAS COWBOYS

Jimmy Johnson teamed up with Jerry Jones to bring the Lombardi Trophy back to "America's Team" after a 15-year drought. With Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith and Michael Irvin leading the way, the Cowboys dominated Buffalo 52-17 on Jan. 31, 1993. Aikman won MVP honors with 273 yards passing and four TDs.

The rematch was closer but the Cowboys prevailed 30-13, handing coach Marv Levy, QB Jim Kelly and the rest of the Bills their fourth straight Super Bowl defeat. Smith had 132 yards rushing and two scores to earn the MVP award.

## DENVER BRONCOS

After losing three Super Bowls in a four-year span to finish the 1980s, John Elway waited eight years to go back and prevented Brett Favre and the Packers from repeating. The Broncos beat Green Bay 31-24 on Jan. 25, 1998. Terrell Davis had 157 yards rushing and three TDs to earn the MVP award.

The Broncos defeated Atlanta 34-19 to repeat. Elway threw for 336 yards and one TD to get MVP honors.

## NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Brady and Bill Belichick won six Super Bowls together in 20 seasons with their second and third titles coming back to back.

Adam Vinatieri kicked a 41-yard field goal with 4 seconds remaining to give the Patriots a 32-29 win over Carolina on Feb. 1, 2004. Brady threw for 354 yards and three TDs to win the second of his five MVP awards and seven rings.

New England held off coach Andy Reid's Philadelphia Eagles the following season, 24-21. Deion Branch had 11 catches for 133 yards to earn the MVP award. Terrell Owens had nine catches for 122 yards for the Eagles after defying his doctor's advice and returning to play just six weeks after ankle surgery.

# NFL players steadily have used more mental health resources since the pandemic, league and union say

**ALLEN PARK, Mich.** (AP)—Former NFL offensive lineman T.J. Lang said no one discussed mental health 15 years ago at the start of his career.

"When you're a big, burly athlete there's part of you that takes pride in keeping things to yourself and looking like you're put together," said Lang, who played in Green Bay for eight seasons and wrapped up his career after the 2018 season following a two-year stint with the Detroit Lions. "It's a different world now. I think it's good that the NFL and teams are trying to help out, and make sure their players are in the right head space.

"There's ultimate pressure in this sport. Sometimes people fail, and sometimes people need help. The more that teams encourage and normalize it, the better."

The NFL and NFL Players Association in 2019 agreed to make it a requirement to have a licensed behavioral health clinician on the staff of each team in an effort to increase mental health resources.

"It was pivotal in terms of setting a standard," said Amber Cargill, director of wellness at the NFLPA.

The Kansas City Chiefs, who will face the San Francisco 49ers in the Super Bowl on Feb. 11, are one of several teams in the league with a full-time professional dedicated to mental health.

The Niners have a licensed behavioral health clinician at their training facilities for 20 to 30 hours a week, much more than the eight to 12 hours mandated in the collective bargaining agreement.

The Ravens, whom the Chiefs beat in the AFC title game, hired someone before it was an obligation, adding team clinician Tricia Bent-Goodley to their staff in 2015.

"I believe we have a culture that has supported my work from its inception really and that starts from the top," she said.

The league and union may not agree on a lot, but they seem to be like-minded in making mental health a priority and ensuring services are readily available.

There has been a steadily increasing number of players taking advantage of the opportunity to talk with mental health professionals ever since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the league and union say.

"Post-pandemic, we've seen an uptick in the willingness to have conversations about getting help and a normalizing of challenges like anxiety and depression," Nyaka NiiLampti, the NFL's vice president of clinical and wellness services, said in a recent telephone interview. "There's also an increase in the recognition that you can't have optimal physical performance if you're not optimizing mental performance."

Lions quarterback Hendon Hooker tried to keep his mind right during his rookie season this past year while coming back from a knee injury that ended his college career at Tennessee and coping with the death of loved ones. Hooker said he spoke with Michelle Garvin, a clinical psychologist who works with the Lions along with co-directors of player engagement, to develop strategies such as learning how to sleep better.

Garvin was hired by Lions general manager Brad Holmes three years ago and is part of a wellness team that includes Sean Pugh and Jessica Gray, whose offices are just steps outside the players' locker room.

Linebacker Alex Anzalone had an issue of his own that he wanted to talk to someone about to try to get over the trauma triggered by the sound of his son's leg breaking while they went down a slide together.

"When I came into work a couple days later I said: 'Hey, Dr. Garvin. I got to talk to you,'" Anzalone recalled. "I could not get the sound of his leg cracking out of my head.

"We see her around all the time. She has open office hours, and Brad does a good job to emphasize that we should see her throughout the year."

Lions coach Dan Campbell said Garvin has become an "unbelievable" part of the team, cultivating relationships with players over time to build trust.

"I do think our players, every year, they're using it more and I do think it's helping in all regards," Campbell said. "You're dealing with time management. You're dealing with family issues. You're dealing with anxiety issues.

"And she always pokes her head up there, too, with the coaches," Campbell added. "She'll come around once a week, once every couple of weeks and she wants to make sure that we're being smart, getting rest."

Buffalo Bills edge rusher Von Miller put it simply.

"There's a stigma but heck, it's help," he said. "If you've got a hamstring pull, you go to the doctor. If you've got a mental something, you go to the doctor.

"Sometimes you can't control what happens physically. Like the body's going to do it what the body's going to do it. But if you're solid mentally, all the other stuff works."

# Ripken Jr., Grant Hill part of investment team that will buy Orioles

By NOAH TRISTER
AP BASEBALL WRITER

AP

Co-founder and co-chairman of the private equity firm The Carlyle Group David Rubenstein speaks in the panel "The Global Economic Outlook" on the last day of the forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, Friday, Jan. 19, 2024.

Cal Ripken Jr. and Grant Hill are part of the investor group that has agreed to buy the Baltimore Orioles, and so are former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke.

The group is headed by Baltimore native David Rubenstein, co-founder of the Carlyle Group. Additional investors were revealed in a news release Wednesday announcing the agreement between Rubenstein and the Angelos family.

"I am excited to once again be a part of the Orioles organization and I thank David for including me in the ownership group," Ripken said in a statement. "The Orioles have been a part of my life since I was a child, and this is a special day."

The Angelos family has run the team for the past three decades and is selling a control stake in the team to Rubenstein for $1.725 billion.

"I am grateful to the Angelos family for the opportunity to join the team I have been a fan of my entire life. I look forward to working with all the Orioles owners, players and staff to build upon the incredible success the team has achieved in recent seasons," Rubenstein said. "Our collective goal will be to bring a World Series trophy back to the city of Baltimore. To the fans I say: We do it for you and can't do it without you."

John Angelos, the club's current chairman, will remain as a senior adviser.

"I am personally committed to helping David and his partners take the franchise to the next level," Angelos said. "We think this transaction is great for Major League Baseball and great for the city of Baltimore and Maryland. We are thankful to the fans and supporters cheering on the O's as we reached this important goal—and who will be with us celebrating more success to come."

Rubenstein's investment team includes Ripken and Hill, who in addition to being Hall of Famers in baseball and basketball have ties to the extended area. Ripken, of course, is an Orioles legend who was born in Havre de Grace, Maryland. Hill is from northern Virginia, not far from Washington.

Other members of the investment group include Bloomberg, Schmoke, Ares Management co-founder Michael Arougheti, Ares Credit Group co-heads Mitchell Goldstein and Michael Smith, and Cognosante founder Michele Kang, who also owns the Washington Spirit of the NWSL.

The sale is subject to a full vote of Major League Baseball ownership and must receive 75% approval.

The Angelos family has been in control of the Orioles since 1993, when Peter Angelos purchased the team for $173 million. Angelos' son John is the team's current chairman, and the Orioles recently reached a deal on a new lease extension at Camden Yards.

"Governor Moore, the Maryland Stadium Authority, and the entire Moore-Miller Administration send their congratulations to Baltimore native David Rubenstein, Michael Bloomberg, Kurt Schmoke, Mike Arougheti, NBA legend Grant Hill, and Maryland native and Orioles legend Cal Ripken Jr. on their deal to purchase the Baltimore Orioles. The governor looks forward to continuing the strong relationship between the State of Maryland and the Baltimore Orioles," said Carter Elliott, a spokesman for Maryland Gov. Wes Moore.

"Governor Moore would like to thank the Angelos family for their contributions to the Orioles community and this storied franchise. Keeping the Orioles in Baltimore for the long term was a key priority for this administration and we are proud that this transaction won't change that."

The Angelos family will keep a significant investment in the team.

"When I took on the role of chair and CEO of the Orioles, we had the objective of restoring the franchise to elite status in major league sports, keeping the team in Baltimore for years to come, and revitalizing our partnership group," John Angelos said. "This relationship with David Rubenstein and his partners validates that we have not only met but exceeded our goals."

The Orioles won 101 games last season, their most since 1979, and their future is bright thanks to young stars Adley Rutschman and Gunnar Henderson—as well as a farm system that has remained loaded even as top prospects moved on to the big leagues.

The team's low payroll has been a sore spot with fans, but this sale offers hope that the Orioles might spend aggressively enough to make the most of the impressive foundation of talent they've built in recent years.

## Donations pour in to replace destroyed Robinson statue on his 105th birthday

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Donations poured in Wednesday to replace a destroyed statue of Jackie Robinson on what would have been the 105th birthday of the first player to break Major League Baseball's color barrier.

Major League Baseball pledged support. And the total raised just through one online fundraiser surpassed $145,000, which is far in excess of the estimated $75,000 value of the bronze statue that was cut from its base last week at a park in Wichita, Kansas. Police are searching for those responsible.

Only the statue's feet were left at McAdams Park, where about 600 children play in a youth baseball league called League 42, which is named after Robinson' s uniform number with the Brooklyn Dodgers, with whom he broke the major leagues' color barrier in 1947.

Fire crews found burned remnants of the statue Tuesday while responding to a trash can fire at another park about 7 miles (11.27 kilometers) away. A truck believed to be used in the theft previously was found abandoned, and police said the theft was captured on surveillance video.

Bob Lutz, executive director of the Little League nonprofit that commissioned the sculpture, said Wednesday in a message on X, formerly Twitter, that the MLB commissioner's office and 30 clubs had committed funding toward the cost of replacing the statue and providing other support.

"Amazing, huh?" he said.

Lutz had said earlier that the money raised also could enhance some of its programming and facilities. In April, the group opened the Leslie Rudd Learning Center, which includes an indoor baseball facility and a learning lab.

"We're not just baseball," Lutz said. "We have after school education, enrichment and tutoring."

One of the largest donations is a $10,000 pledge from an anonymous former Major League Baseball player who won a World Series. Wichita police Chief Joe Sullivan, who announced the donation over the weekend, has urged anyone involved in the theft to surrender and vowed that arrests were imminent.

"The community, along with the business community and the nation as a whole, have demonstrated an incredible outpouring of support," Sullivan said in a statement Wednesday. "This effort highlights the kindness of the people and their determination to rebuild what was taken away from our community."

Lutz, whose friend, the artist John Parsons, made the statue before his death, said the mold is still viable and anticipated that a replacement can be erected within a matter of months.

"We value what it represents," he said. "It's important that our 600 kids understand what it represents. And, we make every effort to educate our kids about the role that Jackie Robinson played in life and civil rights, his life beyond sports. He's the absolute best role model you could imagine."

League 42 drew attention to Robinson's birthday Wednesday in a Facebook post, noting that "his legacy will hold up forever" and asking for donations.

Robinson played for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues before joining the Brooklyn Dodgers, paving the way for generations of Black American ballplayers. He's considered not only a sports legend but also a civil rights icon. Robinson died in 1972.

Lutz said that the league appeals to "all kids, but especially to kids of color" and that the connection to Robinson resonated.

"We can't imagine, being named League 42 without a Jackie Robinson statue in our park," he said. "It was a no-brainer when we went about trying to name our league. And the name League 42 came up. It was like lightning and struck. We knew we had our name."

## All-Star Hays, Orioles argue 1st salary arbitration case of year

**SCOTTSDALE, Ariz.** (AP)— Austin Hays and the Baltimore Orioles argued the first of 18 scheduled salary arbitration cases, with the All-Star outfielder asking a three-person panel for $6.3 million on Tuesday and the team arguing for $5.85 million.

A decision by Brian Keller, Allen Ponak and Jasbir Parmer is not expected until after cases involving Los Angeles Angels outfielder Taylor Ward and Houston Astros infielder/outfielder Mauricio Dubón are resolved or argued.

The 28-year-old Hays hit .275 last year with 16 homers and 67 RBIs, earning $3.2 million. He is eligible for free agency after the 2025 season.

Two additional Orioles remain scheduled for hearings, which run through Feb. 16: right-hander Jacob Webb ($1 million vs. $925,000) and first baseman/outfielder Ryan O'Hearn ($3.8 million vs. $3.2 million).

Toronto star Vladimir Guerrero Jr. has asked for $19.9 million and been offered $18.05 million by the Blue Jays. If the case doesn't settle, it would be the highest salary awarded in arbitration win or lose, topping the $14 million Seattle outfielder Teoscar Hernández received after he lost his hearing last year.

By MARK RABAGO
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EDITOR

# Ellery Cruz elected president of MRA

Former Expert Class champion Ellery Cruz has succeeded Charles Cepeda as president of the Marias Racing Association.

Cruz was elected during the Jan. 18 MRA meeting at the Carolinian Utt in Garapan.

The 2021 Expert Class champion taking the mantle of leadership of MRA comes as the association is getting ready to usher in the highly anticipated 2024 season.

Joining Cruz in the new leadership team of MRA are vice president Paul Guerrero, secretary Amanda Cruz, and treasurer David Burger.

Cruz and company will spearhead MRA as it's about to kick off the new season with great anticipation. Starting in 2024, the motocross club will be increasing its monthly races from seven to nine.

Skipping the traditional January race, MRA will now make its point race series debut on Feb. 18 at 10am sharp at the Cowtown Race Track.

Cepeda wished Cruz and the new leadership team the best of luck as they guide MRA to a new phase in its growth since being revived in 2020.

MARK RABAGO

Ellery Cruz, center during the 2021 Marias Racing Association point series awards banquet, has been elected president of the MRA.

"Under the guidance of our new leadership, MRA is set to soar to new heights. President Ellery Cruz has garnered unwavering support from both the esteemed board members and our dedicated membership. Together with the rest of the leadership team at the helm, we are in the hands of a truly exceptional team," he said.

Cepeda added that Cruz and company can continue to rely on the support of the MRA board made up of directors Justis "Cuki" Alvarez, Bridgette Camacho, Dave Celis, Ray Yumul, and himself, who will now wear the title of immediate past president.

"With such a talented and passionate group, the future of MRA has never looked brighter," he added.

Before taking a bow for years of service as president of MRA, Cepeda took the opportunity to implore the community to continue to support the MRA.

"This is where dreams are made and champions are born. Get ready to witness the heart-pounding excitement of the nine points series races, as our fearless competitors push their limits to claim victory. So, buckle up and prepare for an electrifying season filled with high-speed thrills, nail-biting moments, and unforgettable memories. The 2024 MRA season is here, and it's time to unleash the excitement!"

## SSHS

*From page 24*

the Manta Rays took the upper hand all the way to the second half, where Darnell Lizama and the rest of the crew continued to put in the work. It wasn't an easy second half though with the Knights pushing in and finally making their shots.

The Knights managed to halt the Manta Rays' offense and went on to score from 13 points in the first half to 22 points after the game. The game could've gone any way but the Manta Rays' Marino Santos and Danny Defang clinched the win by making their free throws.

Lizama found the basket the most with 7 points, while Defang assisted with 4 points. The Knights' Arturo Travilla scored 6 points and Brandon Tesiro scored 4, while the rest scored 3 points each.

In the first game of the day, MHS Yellow also slipped past sister team MHS Blue, 28-27.

It was a battle of Dolphins as both teams wanted to make a bigger splash than the other, but the Yellow team pulled out all the stops and maneuvered their way to victory by one point.

Carl Sanchez led the Yellow team through stop signs put up by the Blue team and collected 12 points. Meanwhile, the Blue team's Stephen Diyco and Hilario Palino split and came up with 6 points each.

Although Sanchez scored the most, teammate Rouvick Quizon had 4 markers and Jerik Javier shot 3 points.

In last Monday's games, Kagman High School JV won over MCS JV, 31-21, and MHS Blue defeated SSHS JV, 29-19.

**SSHS JV 23** – Lizama 7, D. Defang 4, Santos 3, T. Cruz 2, Gutierrez 2, Lucero 2, Paul 2, C. Cruz 1.

**MCS JV 22** – Travilla 6, Tesiro 4, Sasamoto 3, Propst 3, Tomokane 3, Palacios 3.

**Scoring by halves**: 18-13, 23-22.

**MHS Yellow 28** – Sanchez 12, Quizon 4, Javier 3, Capalad 2, Cultura 2, Tabhan 2, Sangalang 2, Paraiso 1.

**MHS Blue 27** – Diyco 6, Palino 6, Basa 5, Rangamar 4, Caponpon 2, Montano 2, Rectitud 2.

**Scoring by halves**: 15-13, 28-27.

LEIGH GASES

Mount Carmel School JV's Brandon Tesiro goes for a jumper during their game against Saipan Southern High School in the 2023-2024 IT&E Interscholastic Boys High School Basketball League last Wednesday night at the MHS Gymnasium.

## LA

*From page 24*

be the need to improve the mental aspect of his game.

"I've learned that I have to work on setting my mind stronger with my confidence specially when starting the set and when it comes to tiebreaks. I'll also do my best to train harder to improve my accuracy and consistency," he said.

Race, who accompanied Lam to Australia, said his ward showed a lot of improvement during their almost monthlong stay in the continent.

"La Hunn's quality of play improved dramatically throughout the Australian Open tournament. He is so good at learning and incorporating information rapidly into his game. So much of it has to do with his confidence level and his opportunity to compete with players of high caliber. He's every bit their equal in talent and work ethic and his 'sports IQ' is as high as I've seen. It was something to watch when he was going toe to toe with the top players from Japan and China and they are barely able to eke out a win against him."

He added that January was just the start of the ITF-supported program that will take Lam throughout 2024 and potentially for the next few years. His calendar includes numerous ITF Junior events, the next being the Junior Davis Cup competition in Sri Lanka where he will join teammates June Yu and Nason Wessel under the direction of coach Colin Ramsey against players from other Asia-Pacific nations.

"He will spend the next three weeks preparing for that competition and go to Singapore just before that for a few days of practice on clay courts, where he excels," said the many time NMSA Coach of the Year and CNMI Sports Hall of Fame inductee.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

La Hunn Lam in action during the Asia-Pacific 14 and U Trophy Event in Australia.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

La Hunn Lam poses in front of a larger-than-life poster of Roger Federer.

## PIRATES

*From page 24*

Palacios added one more. After another three runs scored for the Pirates in the third inning, the Spartans waved the white flag in the fifth inning when they couldn't make contact with heaters by Tenorio.

Only six hits were made by the Spartans while the Pirates racked up tallies in slugging categories that continue to showcase their offense in the unbeaten ride they've had so far.

The Pirates altogether walked 12 times, while the only hits besides Aguon and Delos Santos were from Pete Sablan's triple and Audie Maratita's single.

In last Tuesday's game, the Blue Jays came back to win, 16-15, over the Marlins. There were no games last night, instead, a game is scheduled for tonight between the Reds and the Dodgers.

There is one more week in the regular season from Feb. 6 to 8, with the postseason set to start on Feb. 13, and the championship series slated for Feb. 19, Feb. 21, and if needed, Feb. 23.

**Blazers spoil Damian Lillard's Portland return, 119-116.**

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# Sports

**Ellery Cruz elected president of MRA.**

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# La Hunn gains invaluable experience in Australia

By MARK RABAGO
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EDITOR

La Hunn Lam may have registered only a win in his recent stint in the Asia-Pacific 14 and U Trophy Event, but the 14-year-old won many experience points in the tournament in Australia.

Lam started his stint in the Land Down Under with back-to-back games last Jan. 24 against No. 2 Dharma Pantaratorn of Thailand and No. 4 Alex Hui of Hong Kong.

He lost a tight one against Pantaratorn, 4-6, 2-6, before succumbing to Hui's excellence, 1-6, 0-6.

Two more competitive matches against Japan's Takahiro Kawaguchi, 6-7, 2-6, and China's Heran Zhang, 4-6, 6-7, resulted in narrow losses last Jan. 25, before Lam finally hit paydirt in the side event for the Australian Open with a walkover win over New Zealand's Zachariah Wu last Jan. 26.

"I am grateful and honored to participate in the Australian Open [side event]. I'd like to thank coach Jeff [Race], coach Gilles [de Gouy], the Oceania Tennis Federation, the International Tennis Federation, all my friends, and my family for supporting me," said Lam.

He added that it was absolutely an amazing experience to play in Australia against the top international players in his age group.

"I got to play against excellent No. 1 players from the big countries. It gave me a lot of great lessons and made my game improve so much. I also got to see Novak [Djokovic], [Stefanos] Tsitsipas, [Daniil] Medvedev, [Jannik] Sinner, and [Frances] Tiafoe—all great professional players at the NTC practicing. It was the highlight of my Australian Open experience."

As for the most important lesson he learned playing in the Asia-Pacific 14 and U Trophy Event, Lam said that it would

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

La Hunn Lam poses with coaches Jeff Race and Gilles de Gouy in the Asia-Pacific 14 and U Trophy Event in Australia.

## SSHS JV, MHS Yellow win close games

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Saipan Southern High School JV and Marianas High School Yellow won close games in the 2023-2024 IT&E Interscholastic Boys High School Basketball League last Wednesday night at the MHS Gymnasium.

SSHS JV defeated Mount Carmel School JV, 23-22, in the last game of the afternoon. The Knights drew first blood off a free throw by Enzo Sasamoto, but the Manta Rays pushed on until they took control of the game, 13-5.

It was a hefty cushion to work with and

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LEIGH GASES

Saipan Southern High School JV's Nikolas Paul lobs a pass to an open teammate as he's tightly guarded by Mount Carmel School JV players during their game in the 2023-2024 IT&E Interscholastic Boys High School Basketball League last Wednesday night at the MHS Gymnasium.

## Pirates clinch Masters League pennant

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The undefeated Pirates clinched the pennant after winning their 10th straight game and finished the regular season strong in the 2023 Tan Holdings-SBL Masters League.

They broke down the unlucky Spartans, 14-2, last Wednesday night at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacio Baseball Field.

The Spartans struck first and seemed like they were going to get on a run-scoring roll, but Pirates pitcher Dung Tenorio put a stop to it before they could really take off. Isaac Aguon and J.J. Teigita scored the Spartans' only two runs in the first inning, while the rest of the lineup fell silent.

The Pirates, on the other hand, got free bases from a flummoxed Spartans pitcher who could not seem to locate the strike zone. All but two batters got on base from walks and one hit by pitch, which the Pirates took advantage of. Ten Pirates reached home from freebies, with only Mario Aguon making contact with a double, and Jerome Delos Santos firing a triple.

It was all downhill from there for the Spartans as they went down in order in the second inning while the Pirates' Eric

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Pirates take a group photo after their pennant-clinching game against the Spartans last Wednesday night in the 2023 Tan Holdings-SBL Masters League at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Baseball Field.